

School of Theology at Claremont



1001 1371783



Dr. Pys' library



The Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

"THE LIVING CHURCH" SERIES

Edited by

Professor JOHN E. McFADYEN, D.D.

United Free Church College, Glasgow.

Crown 8vo, cloth boards, 6s. net per volume.

IT has of late become the fashion to belittle the Church as of negligible importance in the affairs of the great world. Those alike who love and who deride her often little understand how great has been her influence in the past, and how much she has done, in many departments of thought and activity, for the higher life of the world. The aim of *The Living Church* Series is partly historical, partly practical: it is to help people to realise what a tremendous factor the Church has been in history, and to show how in fresh forms the old needs, problems, and tasks are perpetually re-emerging—in short, to stimulate a fresh appreciation of the Church and to quicken faith in her power to affect the future as she has affected the past.

The following volumes have been arranged for :

The Changing Church and the Unchanging Jesus.

By R. H. COATS, B.D., Birmingham.

The Church and Art.

By J. ROBERTSON CAMERON, PH.D., Aberdeen.

The Church and the Bible.

By PROF. WILLIAM A. CURTIS, D.LITT., D.D.,
Edinburgh.

The Church's Charter.

By PROF. JOSEPH F. McFADYEN, M.A., Kingston,
Ontario.

***The Church and the Creeds.**

By DANIEL LAMONT, B.D., Helensburgh.

The Church's Debt to the Heretics.

By PROF. RUFUS M. JONES, D.D., Haverford, Pa.,
U.S.A.

The volumes marked with an asterisk are now ready.

[P.T.O.]

The Church and Education.

By PROF. ARCH. MAIN, D.LITT., D.D., Glasgow.

The Church and the Healing Ministry.

By PROF. SAMUEL McCOMB, D.D., Cambridge,
Mass. U.S.A., and Elwood Worcester, D.D.,
Boston, U.S.A.

The Church and Liberty.

By A. J. CARLYLE, M.A., D.LITT., Oxford.

The Church and Literature.

By JOHN A. HUTTON, D.D., London.

The Church and the Mystics.

By EVELYN UNDERHILL, London.

***The Church at Prayer.**

By PROF. PERCY DEARMER, M.A., D.D., London.

***The Church and the Sacraments.**

By PRINCIPAL W. M. CLOW, D.D., Glasgow.

The Church and the State.

By PROF. P. CARNEGIE SIMPSON, D.D., Cambridge.

The Church and Union.

By CANON T. A. LACEY, M.A., Worcester.

The Church and Woman.

By A. MAUDE ROYDEN, London.

Current Cults.

By PROF. R. E. WELSH, D.D., Montreal.

The Preachers of the Church.

By PRINCIPAL A. E. GARVIE, D.D., London.

Representative Churchmen of Twenty Centuries.

By PROF. HUGH WATT, B.D., Edinburgh.

The Story of Social Christianity (2 vols.).

By F. HERBERT STEAD, M.A., Warden of Browning
Hall, 1894-1921.

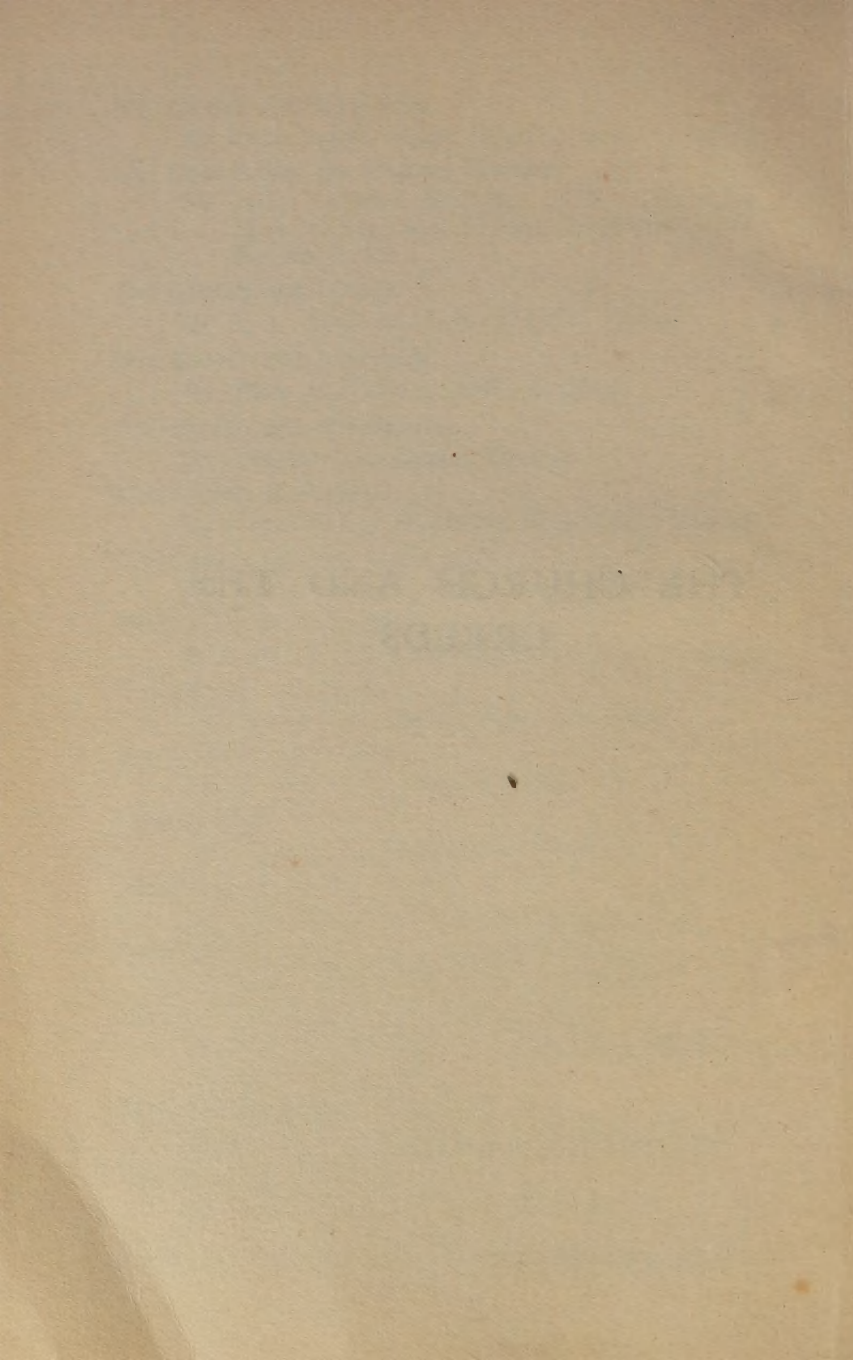
The Thinkers of the Church.

By ARCH. B. D. ALEXANDER, D.D., Langbank.

The Vocation of the Church.

By J. H. LECKIE, D.D., Edinburgh.

THE CHURCH AND THE
CREEDS



90
3

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

BY

DANIEL LAMONT, B.D.

MINISTER OF PARK UNITED FREE CHURCH, HELENSBURGH

LONDON

JAMES CLARKE & CO., LIMITED

13 AND 14 FLEET STREET, E.C. 4

"THE LIVING CHURCH" SERIES

THE CHURCH
AND THE FIELDS

THE CHURCH
AND THE FIELDS

THE CHURCH
AND THE FIELDS

Printed in Great Britain

TO
THE CENTURIONS
BROTHERS ALL

School of Theology
at Claremont

A91607

PREFACE

THE short historical sketch which forms Part I. of this book is meant to do no more than provide a foundation for the argument which follows in Parts II. and III. The œcumenical creeds and those most closely associated with them are reproduced for reference, the translations being taken, with few changes, from Schaff's *Creeds of the Greek and Latin Churches*. For the relevant literature, the reader is referred to the list given at the end of the Article *Creeds*, in *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, eleventh edition. For the groundwork of the whole subject he is recommended to study *The Rule of Faith*, by Professor W. P. Paterson (Hodder & Stoughton, 1902).

Part II. is an attempt to prove that creeds have had and still have an important place in the life of the Church.

Part III., in suggesting a Confession for Christendom, does not err in lack of audacity, but it is the best way known to the writer of bringing his argument to a point. The motive may excuse the boldness.

DANIEL LAMONT.

HELENSBURGH,
6th July 1923.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	7
PART I. HISTORICAL	
A SHORT ACCOUNT OF SOME REPRESENTATIVE SYMBOLS .	11
PART II. DEFENSIVE	
THE CHARTER OF THE CREEDS	99
PART III. CONSTRUCTIVE	
CREEDS FOR TO-DAY	161
INDEX	255

PART I

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF SOME REPRESENTATIVE SYMBOLS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF CREED . . .	13
II. THE OLD ROMAN CREED	22
III. THE APOSTLES' CREED	30
IV. THE CREED OF NICÆA, 325 A.D.	37
V. THE NICENE CREED (Enlarged Form)	46
VI. THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON	50
VII. THE ATHANASIAN CREED	60
VIII. THE DOCTRINAL STANDARDS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH	65
IX. CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES	73

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF CREED

THE idea of formulation has come long ago to take an inherent place in the idea of a Church's creed or confession. The reason for this is perfectly natural. A Church is a community of persons based upon a common faith; and very early in its history the Church felt it necessary to say as clearly as possible, and in some authoritative way, what that common faith was. An individual may have a creed according to which he lives, without feeling the compulsion to throw it into a formula; but it is otherwise with a society whose very existence is bound up with similarity of belief. In order to exhibit and strengthen the unity of believers in Christ, and in so doing to mark them off from an unknowing and unbelieving world, it was essential that the Church should formulate its faith. Formulation has, therefore, come to belong to the essence of creed, and it was bound to bring its own peril along with it. There is as much truth in

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Hegel's saying as there is in most generalisations : "The idea makes the organisation, and then the organisation kills the idea." If embodied ideas inevitably met so cruel a fate we might well despair of social progress ; but it cannot be denied that institutions have too often been the death of the ideas which they were meant to enshrine. Formulæ are useful, but they may stultify the intelligence. The mere fact that a creed is a formulation demands from those who hold it ceaseless vigilance against mental drowsiness. The proper safeguard lies in a continuous recollection of the idea which it has been found necessary to embody in a creed. What is that idea in its origin and essence ? This, that it is the breath of the Church's life to confess Christ. To do this is at once its missionary task and an indispensable condition of its own existence. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. x. 9). "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 10). The well-being of the Church demands formulation of its faith ; the very life of the Church demands confession of its faith.

When Jesus put the question to the Twelve at Cæsarea Philippi : "Who do men say that I am ?" and Simon Peter, spokesman for the rest, replied : "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he uttered a confession which was a genuine ante-

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF CREED

cedent of Church creeds and confessions. It was an original, heart-felt word, with nothing of the formula about it, and the glow which was in it awoke an answering glow in the heart of the Lord: "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of John, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in heaven." The emotion of that reply must not be missed. The confession was the occasion for hearty congratulation. Jesus made it a point of departure in His ministry and especially in His training of the Twelve. It is unhistorical to assume that the disciples, or any one of them, had at that stage reached a clear and full apprehension of their Lord. They had a long way still to go, but they were on the way. He saw, less perhaps in the spoken words than in the hearts which beat behind the words, that He could now safely trust their love and loyalty to Himself. He could now entrust them with the thought of His approaching death. That thought would bring their souls into a heavy storm, but in their devotion to Him they carried an anchor which would serve them well in the gale. It gladdened Him to find that they had reached one port in their spiritual voyage from which they could set out better equipped for the angrier seas ahead. And we may well believe that our Lord evoked the confession from the Twelve, not so much for any information that He required, as for the strengthening which the confession would bring to their souls. We have the

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

authority of Jesus for it that it is good for His disciples to confess Him.

The confession at Cæsarea Philippi expressed what the eyes of the disciples had already learned to see in Jesus. It was an important though minor summit in their spiritual experience, and the divine revelation which had lifted them so high was mediated to them through the words and works of Jesus and through the whole play of His personality upon their lives. That experience of theirs was not exhausted in its emotional elements. It was penetrated by thought and resolve. Mind was active in it, alike in reflection and in resolution. The confession was a hearty affirmation about Jesus in relation to God, and the emotion in it implied a readiness to proceed upon the truth of the affirmation. The essence of creed lies in the blending of such affirmation with such devotion; and if, in speaking of the creeds of the Church, we linger much in the kingdom of the mind, it is well to remind ourselves thus early that it becomes a poor affair if ever we abandon the kingdom of the heart.

After the Death and Resurrection of our Lord and the birth of His Church, brief confessions of faith soon began to find a place in the life of Christian communities. These were embryonic creeds. The idea which inspires every true creed was there, living and powerful and creative, while words and phrases which found an echo in the hearts of believers were soon invested with a peculiar sanctity.

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF CREED

They were warm, heartfelt expressions, further on than that of Cæsarea Philippi, but the same in mood and quality. The chief of these, and probably the first, was *Jesus is Lord*; and while this first and shortest of Church confessions welled up spontaneously from the new Pentecostal experience it was soon, in a secondary sense, a formula. There is little doubt that, in almost the very earliest days, candidates for Christian baptism were required to make this confession. What is of importance here is to notice two things: (1) That this earliest confession of the Church took its rise from reasons of the heart. "No man can say *Jesus is Lord* but in the Holy Spirit," says St. Paul, thus emphasising the necessity for conviction in the confessing heart and the spirituality of the source whence alone that conviction comes. The exultant heart must sing and sometimes even shout. *Jesus is Lord* was a new *Hallelujah*. In times of temptation and danger it may have been used as an ejaculatory prayer or a password or a rallying-cry. In dark days the sound of the name would have the power of a trumpet-call. "Up, hearts!" Other short ejaculations seem to have been similarly used at certain places and times, such as: *The Lord is at hand*, or, *Faithful the word*. And (2) it must be noticed that *Jesus is Lord* came almost immediately to be regarded as "a form of sound words." The Christian Church put the stamp of its approval upon it and accepted it naturally as a fitting baptismal con-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

fession. It was in the first instance a song and in the second a formula, and when it was used as a formula it was not meant to be any the less a song.

In that first Church confession *Jesus is Lord*, for those who uttered the name with comprehension, the most complete Christian creed lay implicit. In the Church's earliest days, when life was at the morn and pale reflection had not blanched the Alpine-glow of faith, the need to explicate the familiar words would hardly be felt. Soldiers fighting side by side against a common foe would be little disposed to subject their battle-cry to a minute analysis. But reflection has a way of asserting itself, and the demand for expansion of the early form was bound to arise. Even within the pages of the New Testament we can detect the beginnings of a movement towards definition. To have right thoughts about Jesus and to have right thoughts about God belong together, and it was inevitable that a statement about Jesus should be expanded in the direction of that knowledge of God which arose out of the Church's experience of its Lord. We can see how, under the impulse of that experience, the thoughts of the Church began almost at once to take the Trinitarian form. When we speak of the Church in this connection it is not meant that the idea of the Trinity broke all at once upon the general mind. In all thought, including Christian thought, there must be pioneers. There were great pioneers of thought in the infant Church,

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF CREED

and they gave the lead, as it was their duty to do. But we must hold resolutely to the fact that the thought of a Trinity within the unity of God answered to the spiritual experience of the Church. When the Church's doctrine of the Trinity came to be challenged later, it was not on grounds of experience but solely on grounds of reason. It was not reason alone that gave birth to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is as plain as anything can be in history that this doctrine did not arise as a philosophical theory, and it is not irrational to conclude that it can only persist as something more than a philosophical theory.

The first fourteen verses of the Epistle to the Ephesians give a characteristic summary of apostolic doctrine, and there it is impressive to see how inevitably the Apostle's glowing experience passes through the Trinitarian mould. Rather, the experience creates the mould. Manifestly, the conception of the Trinity is not for him an intellectual frame into which he must somehow or other fit the experience of redemption through Christ which is his theme. Such a vital experience as his, and he assumes it to be normal in the sense of being open to all believers, cannot submit to any artificial framework. The glowing fact of redemption, the love of God the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ through His life poured out for us upon the Cross, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit who is already the earnest of that inheritance which is the hope of

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

believing hearts,—these all belong to one indivisible and passionate experience. It is true that the doctrine of the Trinity is not developed in these verses, but that fact is in exact accord with the point which is presently of interest to us. There is a profound intellectual interest in the verses, but it is so far from being the leading interest that it is obviously incidental. The religious interest is the dominant one; it was the only interest in the Apostle's mind at the time; and the intellectual interest is all the more impressive that it enters as an unbidden guest, an unpremeditated extra, according to the promise that "all these things" shall be added to those who seek first the Kingdom of God.

Through this process of expansion which we recognise as having begun in New Testament times, baptism into the name of Jesus passed gradually to baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Whatever view we take of the occurrence of the Trinitarian formula in Matt. xxviii. 19, it must be remembered that the New Testament shows little or no interest in formulæ as such. Literalism was as remote from our Lord's practice in language as legalism was from His thoughts. In this respect, at least, His immediate followers caught His spirit unmistakably. When we consider the variants in the reports of the Lord's words at the institution of His Supper, or the difference between the two forms of the prayer which He taught to His disciples, or when we note

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF CREED

the lack of reference to the Lord's Prayer outside of two of the gospels, we are driven to the conclusion that the spirit of the New Testament was serenely indifferent to set forms of words. No formula, however sacred, was meant to become a fetish in the Church of Jesus Christ. The words of Matt. xxviii. 19 might quite well have been spoken by the Risen Lord to His disciples without any intention on His part, or any assumption on theirs, that they were meant to be used as a rigid formula of baptism. The whole atmosphere of the gospel and the earliest history of the Church are both conclusive against the idea that our Lord was prescribing a formula when He gave to His followers His last commission to make disciples of all nations and to employ the Sacrament of Christian baptism. All the same, the dialectic of the Church's life gradually brought about the use of the longer baptismal form. Definition had begun, and there was no saying where it would end.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD ROMAN CREED

1. I believe in GOD THE FATHER Almighty.
2. And in JESUS CHRIST, His only Son, our Lord ;
3. Who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary ;
4. Was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried ;
5. The third day He rose from the dead ;
6. He ascended into heaven ; and sitteth on the right hand of the Father ;
7. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8. And in the HOLY GHOST ;
9. The Holy Church ;
10. The forgiveness of sins ;
11. The resurrection of the flesh.

USING the word *creed* in the restricted sense of a *Formula of Belief used as such in the Christian Church*, we can now say with fair certainty that the Old Roman Creed is the earliest of the creeds of Christendom. It was in use as early as the year 150 A.D. We are not to think of it as having been composed about that time by some individual or company of individuals. It arose gradually and spontaneously out of the heart of the Church so that by the middle of the second century it had reached the form in which we now recognise it. That circumstance gives it a place and interest of

THE OLD ROMAN CREED

its own among the creeds of Christendom. No outstanding scholar or thinker set his individual stamp upon it; no council gave it ecclesiastical authority; it broke forth from the soul of the early Church like the chorus of birds at the dawn of a day in spring, and carried its own authority with it. Deep called unto deep, and found its response there. We may not be able to date the greatest of our Christian hymns, the *Te Deum*, in its final form, earlier than the fifth century, but it cannot be doubted that it was the product of a long development and that it was the creed in song. It should be one of the tests of a creed that it can be sung.

It may be argued that the systematic form of the *Old Roman Creed* is not consonant with the idea of its spontaneity. Such an argument would be valid if we knew that the Church of the second century was not concerned with the intellectual interest of Christianity. We know that the reverse was the case. There was much reflection upon the contents of the faith; and that reflection, as in the apostolic age, tended quite naturally to be cast in the Trinitarian mould. It does not follow that when the heart is awake the mind must be asleep. Besides, the second century was continuous with the first. Simple though that proposition is, it seldom gets its full weight even with historians. We speak freely about different generations as if they could be as clearly marked off from one another as railway carriages, but there is never any particular point at

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

which one generation ends and another begins. Both the creed and the soul of the Church in the second century were continuous with and near to those in the first; and we are justified in holding that the later time, though far less creative, was hardly less lyrical. Modern scholars have proved that the *Old Roman Creed* adequately expresses the faith of the early Church, which fashioned and used it and gloried in it.

It may be claimed for this creed that, having come in the right way, it is of the right kind. Thus early, by preserving the balance between emotion and thought, it sets for all time the type to which a true creed should always conform. It is in the first instance a summary of the fundamental affirmations of the Christian heart. The formula with which it begins: "I believe in" is better brought out by the translation: "I believe on." It stands out clearly as something more than mental assent to a series of propositions. It is a venture of the soul. What the person really says is: "I rest my faith on God, etc." From the first word of the creed to the last, he declares that he gives his life in pledge. He commits himself to the truth of what he affirms. He believes them, and he promises to proceed upon them at every step of life. The heart's task is accepted in the solemn formula of introduction, but there is far more than that. The heart's claims are met by the truths which are affirmed. They who can utter this

THE OLD ROMAN CREED

creed with a sense of reality have cast anchor within the veil where anchorage is sure. And while its affirmations are primarily of the heart, they stand unashamed before the tribunal of the highest reason. The vindication of this statement implies the vindication of the Religion of Christ. All that needs to be emphasised at the moment is that the Church's mind was alert in the evolution of this heart-felt creed. One illustration will suffice. The last word of the creed has given rise to considerable misgivings in recent times. For one thing, "the resurrection of the flesh" is not the apostolic phrase, but "the resurrection of the body." With the New Testament phrase ready to hand, why did the Church of the second century adopt another phrase, and one which seems less satisfactory? Does it mean that the Church was thinking or that she was not thinking? So distinguished a scholar as Harnack inclines to the latter alternative, and maintains that here, as elsewhere, the Church of the second century had departed from the apostolic tradition. But more light has revealed that, whether the Church was right or wrong in making the bold change from "body" to "flesh," she at least knew what she was doing. By the middle of the second century, chiefly through the impact of Gnostic theories regarding the body, the Christian hope of the resurrection of the body was being subjected to all manner of allegorising interpretations, such as that it meant baptism or conversion. The

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Church felt that in order to secure the apostolic meaning she must change the apostolic language. "The resurrection of the *flesh*" was adopted as a check upon allegorising tendencies. It proves both the Church's audacity and her determination to cling to the apostolic faith, and incidentally it proves that she was thinking.

It must now be asked whether this great creed reproduces the apostolic faith in the apostolic proportion. It is Scriptural in its structure, in its affirmations, and even, excepting the last phrase, in its language. It has much of the apostolic ring about it, but it is required of a perfect creed that it preserve the balance of Christian truth as it is in the New Testament. Does the *Old Roman Creed* survive this test? It seems to fall short in two respects. (1) It does not stress the Saviourhood of Christ. His Lordship, His divinity, His humanity, and His humiliation receive their due emphasis, but it does not state explicitly that He died for our sins or for our redemption. It may be admitted that everything that is involved in the Cross of Christ is implied in the emphasis upon His death, taken along with the whole article on the Holy Spirit. The forgiveness of sins is the foundation experience in redemption, and the resurrection of the body will be the crowning experience; and these, as the creed implies, are mediated to believers by the Holy Spirit on behalf of Christ. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and applies them to

THE OLD ROMAN CREED

us. All the same, it cannot be admitted that the creed at this point is apostolic in emphasis. In the Apostles' teaching he who runs may read that Christ died for our sins, but the same cannot be said of this creed. "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God"—that is in the creed, but we miss the characteristic apostolic touch which follows: "who loved me and gave Himself up for me." If it be argued that the creed follows the Synoptic rather than the Pauline tradition, it is sufficient to reply that at the point referred to it misses the Synoptic emphasis as well.

(2) Its emphasis of the Miraculous Conception is not apostolic. The Virgin Birth laid hold upon the imagination of the sub-apostolic Church. They gloried in it because to them it provided an unambiguous proof of the Lord's divinity. So it found its way into their creed as a central affirmation of the faith. The only relevant question here is as to whether its place in the creed is justified by the Apostles' teaching, and the answer must be in the negative. It is a matter of historical fact that in the earliest preaching of the gospel the miraculous conception was not given a prominent place. Whatever the Apostles thought about it, they certainly felt that it was not a point upon which emphasis should be laid. If they themselves rejoiced in it, they must have had the intuitive sense to know that if it were put in the forefront of their message it would tend inevitably to draw men's

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

minds away from the spiritual core of the gospel. They saw clearly that in the religion of Christ ethical and spiritual magnitudes must have priority over the metaphysical, and that Christ must be accepted of men for what He is and what He has done, rather than for the miraculousness of His birth. And above all, they had the mind of Christ Himself as their final authority for His own gospel.

Judged by the standard of the proportion of the faith laid down by the New Testament, the *Old Roman Creed* seems to have those two defects, but we must not allow any defects to conceal from us the inherent greatness of that creed. It trains the eye of faith upon its proper object, and invites the eye to fill itself therewith. It calls us to venture all upon God the Father of Jesus ; and upon Jesus Himself, who, having come in the flesh, fulfilled all His Father's will upon the earth, even unto death, and is appointed to be the Judge of the human race ; and on the Holy Spirit, the Other Self of Jesus, who is the earnest of our inheritance now and will complete our redemption by and by. It is by such seeing and such venturing that men enter into the life which is life indeed. That life is there, and this creed bids us receive it. The watershed between authentic and spurious Christianity is the decision as to whether God alone saves us or whether we must save ourselves, and there can be no doubt on which side of the watershed this creed leaves us. It

THE OLD ROMAN CREED

is a great creed, and its essential greatness has had witness borne to it by all the succeeding centuries. For in its expanded form, which is the subject of the next chapter, it has held a firm hold of the Christian consciousness down to the present hour.

CHAPTER III

THE APOSTLES' CREED

1. I believe in GOD THE FATHER Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth.
2. And in JESUS CHRIST, His only Son, our Lord;
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hades;
5. The third day He rose from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
7. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8. I believe in the HOLY GHOST;
9. The Holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints;
10. The forgiveness of sins;
11. The resurrection of the flesh;
12. And the life everlasting. Amen.

THE Apostles' Creed in its accepted form begins to appear about the year 700 A.D., and maintains its place in the Western Church until now. It is not so much a development as a revision of the Old Roman Creed. The additions to the older creed were not made all at once, but gradually, between the fourth and seventh centuries. No doubt the reasons for making these additions were held at the

THE APOSTLES' CREED

time to be valid, but as we look at them from our modern standpoint we cannot regard any of them as vital. Probably not one of them, with a single exception, was meant to add anything to the doctrinal sense of the older creed, the idea being to draw out the true meaning here and there, and add to the impressiveness of the whole. It seems fair to say that, if we take the additions in the sense given to them by the average intelligent worshipper of to-day, they add nothing of importance to the older creed; while if we take them in the sense intended by their originators, some of them rather detract both from the purity of doctrine and from the impressiveness of the earlier form.

It is sufficient here to refer to the four additions which seem most important. (1) Under affirmation 4 we have the addition: "He descended into Hades." It is rash to say what the average worshipper has in his mind when he repeats these words, but perhaps he connects them vaguely with Christ going and preaching "unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter iii. 19). It can be stated, however, with a fair degree of certainty, that the thought which prompted the Church at the time when the clause was added (not later than 390 A.D.) was not inspired by the text in 1 Peter, but by Eph. iv. 9: "He also descended into the lower parts of the earth." From the fact that the added clause appears first as a substitute for "dead" or "buried," it can be strongly argued that the intention of the addition

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

was to stress the teaching with regard to the humiliation of Christ. Neither "hell" nor even "hades" was in the mind of the originators of the new clause, but "the lower parts of the earth," referred to by St. Paul. The clause in question is therefore not so perplexing as it sounds. It was intended to emphasise the fact that our Lord "continued under the power of death for a time." But, innocuous as it is when understood historically, it is questionable whether it adds anything of value to the older creed, while the misunderstandings which have gathered about it compel the feeling that "the old is better."

(2) Into affirmation 9 the word "Catholic" has been introduced. This addition would call for no comment, but for the changes which have taken place in the meaning of the word. The word has an interesting history which brings out the fact that, unlike the addition discussed in the last paragraph, it means something better now than was intended by those who first introduced it into the creed. Its introduction was not earlier than 450 A.D., and the word had by that time come to mean "orthodox." "The Holy Catholic Church," when the phrase was first uttered, would convey the same impression as "The Holy Orthodox Church" conveys to a Russian Christian of to-day. We are accustomed to find a more genial suggestion in the word "Catholic"; but it is well to remember that it was first used in the creed, not in the interest of what we now term "catholicity," or the unity of all true

THE APOSTLES' CREED

followers of Christ, but in the limiting interest of standard doctrine. But when the justification of a word depends upon a change from its original sense, we are entitled to question whether its importation into the creed has had anything else than a weakening effect.

(3) It will be observed that another addition is introduced into the same affirmation—"The communion of saints." Without entering into the long discussion as to what is meant, or should be meant, by the phrase, we may say that the history of the phrase points to the conclusion that it was introduced into the creed chiefly for the purpose of encouraging prayers to departed "saints." Its place in the creed cannot be traced back earlier than 550 A.D., and at that comparatively late date the word "saints" had already moved away from its New Testament meaning of "believers" to its ecclesiastical sense of "pre-eminent believers," while the martyrs of the Church had begun to be invested with something almost more than a special sanctity. We can so far recover the atmosphere in which this addition was made to the creed as to be led to wish that it had not been made. However beautiful the ideas may be which we now import to the added phrase, it may safely be said that, in so far as these ideas are true, they are all included in the one affirmation which so well brings dignity and simplicity together: "I believe in the Holy Church."

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

(4) "And the life everlasting" is numbered as an added affirmation (12) because it was really meant to add something to the doctrinal sense. The other additions were regarded as mere expansions of the existing affirmations, but this one seems to have been intended to serve a more positive purpose. It is agreed that something may be said in favour of its insertion in the creed. A positive statement of the Christian hope for a life which has no end can hardly be out of place in a Christian creed. Our English translators have rightly gauged the intention of those responsible for the original insertion of this affirmation in the creed by translating the Latin word *æternam*, "everlasting." For it is almost certain that it was the time-element that was meant to be the first suggestion of the adjective. Nevertheless, it is precisely there that the chief objection to the insertion arises. The New Testament phrase "eternal life" (Greek, *zōē aiōnios*) ought to be scrupulously reserved for its full New Testament connotation. It is supremely life of a particular *quality*, "the life which is life indeed," and afterwards, of course, life which outlasts *time*. The proportion of the phrase needs constantly to be rescued from the ascendancy of the time-element, and here is the Apostles' Creed perpetuating the wrong ascendancy. Besides, the last two affirmations of the Old Roman Creed so simply and powerfully express the Christian faith in redemption from sin and death, through the

THE APOSTLES' CREED

quickenings power of the Holy Ghost, that one may be excused for regarding the addition of this twelfth affirmation as a superfluity, if not an anticlimax. At all events, it is not easy to be enthusiastic over the addition.

At the same time it must be repeated that what we have been bold enough to count as blemishes are no more than spots in the sun. The greatness of the Old Roman Creed is not lost in its successor, the Apostles' Creed. It is owing to its inherent greatness that it has stood so well the test of centuries. The form which has come down to us is not an improvement upon the earlier form; rather the reverse. Something of the old sharp edge has been worn off, worn off by the action of centuries not distinguished by apostolic clearness of vision. But the Apostles' Creed has proved itself worthy to stand until this hour. It has been great enough to stand. And even if we maintain that here we have an instance in which development does not mean improvement, we can yet allow that the pious ages which effected the changes we have been considering upon the older creed had a perfect right to do as they did. There is nothing to indicate that they felt themselves greatly daring in tampering with a venerable document. They simply exercised their Christian freedom as the Church of every age is meant to do. We do not agree with Luther's strictures upon the Epistle of James, while yet we allow to him the liberty of a Christian man to apply

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

his intelligence even to the Scriptures. We do not approve the changes made in the old creed between the fourth and the seventh centuries, but we commend the Church of those old times for daring to be free. Freedom is one mark of the true Church; and if, for any reason, we decline the responsibilities of freedom, we are poor successors of men who used their freedom as spontaneously as they breathed the air.

CHAPTER IV

THE CREED OF NICÆA, 325 A.D.

We believe in one God, the FATHER Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten ; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ; by whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth ; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man ; He suffered, and the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven ; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the HOLY GHOST.

[But those who say : " There was a time when He was not " ; and " He was not before He was made " ; and " He was made out of nothing," or " He is of another substance " or " essence," or " The Son of God is created," or " changeable," or " alterable "—they are condemned by the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.]

THE Apostles' Creed is one of the three symbols known as *œcumenical* ; that is, symbols which have found acceptance with the three great branches of Christendom—the Latin, Greek, and Evangelical Protestant Churches. We have taken it first, partly because in its earlier form it is first in order of time, partly because it has on the whole gained a more cordial acceptance than either of the other two.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

We pass now to the second of the œcumenical creeds, the Nicene ; and, to begin with, we consider the parent of the approved Nicene formula, that, namely, which was agreed upon by the first œcumenical council of the Church, held at Nicæa in 325 A.D.

When the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great declared himself a Christian, and Christianity passed from being a persecuted religion to being a privileged one, a great calm might have been looked for within the Church. But in place of a calm there arose a new and violent storm. The whole Eastern Church was rent by a controversy over the Person of Christ. "Was Jesus truly God?" was the question in debate. The Emperor began to fear that the unity of his Eastern Empire was imperilled by the theological war, and, much less concerned for religion than for politics, resolved to intervene in the interests of peace. The best way to do it, he was persuaded, was by calling a thoroughly representative council of bishops. Accordingly at Nicæa, in the year 325, there assembled no fewer than 318 bishops, all belonging to the Eastern branch of the Church, save one; that one however, Hosius of Spain, being the most influential of all, since he was Constantine's adviser. The protagonists in the controversy were Arius, chief exponent of the views which had caused all the ferment, and Athanasius, a young man who had already taken his place as the champion of orthodoxy

THE CREED OF NICÆA

in the East. Athanasius was not a member of the council, not being a bishop, but, next to the Emperor and Hosius, his influence was paramount in the council's decisions. The position of Arius was briefly this, that since there can be only one God, Jesus cannot have been truly God. This did not mean that He was merely man, for Arius was by no means a thorough-going unitarian. He held that the Logos, created by God before the world began and so in a sense divine, assumed a human body and became the Jesus of history. The Arians, as the followers of Arius were called, clung first and always to the indivisible unity of God, and drew a strict line between the Creator and the created. They gave Jesus a unique place in the universe, and still they put Him on the "created" side of the line. Athanasius drew the line with equal sharpness between Creator and created, but he put Jesus on the "Creator" side. It is manifest that a controversy upon these lines could not be settled by a compromise. One side or other must win. The Athanasians, contrary to early expectation, had an almost complete triumph. The answer of the council to the question in dispute was that Jesus *was* truly God. Arianism was condemned as a heresy, and orthodoxy secured a signal ecclesiastical triumph.

But the victory had a sinister side. For one thing, the imperial influence was overwhelming. Constantine was interested mainly in the political

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

peace of his empire, and he saw, with the help of Hosius, that his end would be best achieved by sacrificing the Arians. There was a middle party in the council, now usually called semi-Arians, who were diplomatically encouraged to believe that they were the saviours of the situation. The creed which they proposed was accepted as a basis; but by the time the council, inspired by Hosius and the Athanasians, was done with it, it was not even a shadow of its former self. The fact is that the Athanasian theology was most akin to the theology of the West, and Hosius had persuaded the Emperor that if unity of doctrine was to be secured over the whole Church, it could only be done by imposing the theology of the West upon the East. The policy therefore was to get Western doctrine established in the Eastern Church by supporting the Athanasians, playing with the semi-Arians, and routing the Arians. In the creed which was ultimately accepted by the council there was only one word which did not satisfy Athanasius, "of the same substance" (Greek, *homoousion*), and that word was proposed by the Emperor at the instigation of Hosius, who desired *homoousion* because it seemed to be the nearest Greek equivalent to the Latin word used in the same connection by the theologians of the West (*consubstantialem*). The real victory, therefore, fell to the West, and that because of imperial influence.

Another thing which lessened the value of the

THE CREED OF NICÆA

victory was that the majority of the council, after all, were dissatisfied with the decisions, and proceeded to interpret the clauses of the new creed in a sense pleasing to themselves. Within a generation, in spite of the triumph of orthodoxy at Nicæa, and partly because of the means by which that triumph was secured, semi-Arianism was completely in the ascendant in the East. It illustrates what no doubt the best men in that old council knew well enough, that uniformity of doctrine imposed upon a Church by undue means may secure political or external unity, but can never bring "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." So far as doctrine was concerned, the Nicene symbol of 325 did little else than provide a starting-point for new and more bitter controversy.

This brief sketch of the external history of the council of Nicæa helps to bring into relief the principles which governed the formulation of the Nicene Creed. (1) The framework of this creed is Trinitarian, and in general is the same as in the case of the Apostles' Creed. Even the language at non-controversial points is the same. It is a safe inference that, if not the Old Roman Creed which in 325 held sway over the Western Church, at least one of its sub-apostolic predecessors was recognised as authoritative by the Eastern Church. But there was more speculation and less unity in the East than in the West, giving rise to a variety of creeds differing more or less from the simple original. The semi-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Arian formula, which was accepted as a starting-point by the Nicene council, hailed from Cæsarea, and may be taken as being, in its form, representative of the Eastern family of creeds in the year 325. All that we wish to point out now is the underlying assumption of the Nicene Creed, that the tradition which culminated in the Apostles' Creed was the true apostolic tradition.

(2) The second principle embodied in the Nicene decisions is that Christian truth must be freed from the tyranny of philosophical speculation on the unconditioned absolute. The fundamental position of Arius was that God is indivisibly One, and therefore Jesus cannot be God. The Nicene council declared this view of God to be intolerable, and the council was right. God must not be defined by negatives. That there is only one God is axiomatic, but this does not mean that we may spin mental cobwebs as to what the unity of God must be. Men were for centuries addicted to indulging themselves in the same kind of intellectual gymnastics in regard to Nature, until Francis Bacon came with his simple, epoch-making advice: "Don't say what Nature must be like. Go to Nature, and let her speak for herself." If Nicæa had done nothing else, it justified its existence by saying in effect to the speculative East: "Don't argue *à priori* about what the unity of God must be like. Go to Him and listen as He speaks for Himself." The semi-Arian draft creed with which the council began, true

THE CREED OF NICÆA

to the type of Eastern expansions, operated with the metaphysical Logos—not the *Word* of the fourth Gospel—in seeking to define the relation of Jesus to God. The Logos and all its speculative associations were intentionally and significantly left out of the creed at Nicæa. This is sufficient proof of the determination that no philosophy should be allowed to overlay the truth as truth is in Jesus.

(3) The third principle of this creed is that the Son, and by implication the Holy Spirit, must not be included in the category of creatures. The line between Creator and created is drawn in the Athanasian way. The Son and the Holy Spirit are identical with the Father, so far as the “substance” of the Godhead is concerned. It is for the purpose of precluding ambiguity on this head that clause is heaped on clause, some of them having a directly anti-Arian intention, such as “not made,” the Arians holding that “begotten” and “made” were identical. The motive behind this assertion of the true Deity of Jesus is at the very heart of the Gospel, and it is the glory of Athanasius that he strove for it as he did. It is the resolve that Jesus be given His true place as the Divine Redeemer of men. The redemption of man requires that the Redeemer be “very God of very God.” A created Being occupying a position somewhere between God and man is not adequate to the calling of Redeemer. It is a cheap and foolish pastime to speak in a superior way about the logomachies of those Nicene theolo-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

gians. The truth is, that Athanasius contended for what was vital to the Christian faith. His greatness lay in his clinging to the heart of the matter. All the same it must be said that this creed, in its eagerness to repel Arianism, put itself in an equivocal position. It is not necessary to dwell upon the word "of one substance," for that word satisfied nobody at the time except the Emperor and Hosius. But it should be noted that this creed, after protesting so strongly the identity of the Son with the Father, is compelled later on to introduce a degree of subordination of the Son to the Father, as every true creed must do. Even at the heart of its achievement it has not preserved the fine balance of the New Testament.

(4) It is worthy to be reckoned as a principle of this creed that it links the incarnation with the redemption. "For us men, and for our salvation," marks an addition which must be heartily welcomed. We miss that note in the Apostles' Creed, for it is not enough to say that it is assumed there. A truth so central as this is in the Gospel should not be assumed. It should be expressed in the creed as plainly as it can be done. It may even be said that the atonement is not made plain enough in the Nicene Creed. But even so, this creed makes an advance towards the New Testament position, and that is something to commend.

(5) Finally, it should be observed that the Nicene Creed was framed of set purpose to be a test of orthodoxy. It was the first creed to be made with

THE CREED OF NICÆA

that intent. The Apostles' Creed in its earlier forms was sometimes used as such a test, but such use was only secondary. Its primary purpose was to serve as a Christian confession, especially at baptism. The Nicene Creed, springing from the first œcumenical council, marks a new departure. It arose out of the atmosphere of controversy, and it bears the marks of controversy. The anathema appended to it is characteristic of the purpose for which the council was convened and of the spirit in which its decisions were taken. The idea of an orthodox test may have been necessary to the evolution of the Church's thought ; it certainly has not increased the prestige of creeds.

CHAPTER V

THE NICENE CREED

(Enlarged form as used by Roman Catholic and
Protestant Churches)

I believe in one GOD THE FATHER Almighty ; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord JESUS CHRIST, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ; by whom all things were made ; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man ; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate ; He suffered and was buried ; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures ; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father ; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead ; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the HOLY GHOST, the Lord and Giver of Life ; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son ; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified ; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins ; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THIS creed is acknowledged to-day by the two great Western Churches, and is related to the original Nicene Creed very much as the Apostles' Creed is

THE NICENE CREED

to the Old Roman Creed. Most of the additions were made, it is supposed, by the second œcumenical council, held at Constantinople in the year 381. The motives which animated that council in revising the creed of Nicæa seem to have been four. (1) To bring it more into line with the Old Roman Creed, both in language and contents. Thus there are introduced the Miraculous Conception, the Crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, the Church, Forgiveness, and the Resurrection of the dead. But there is no slavish copying of the Old Roman Creed. Rather, the idea was to improve upon it by richer content and more Scriptural language. (2) To repel the Macedonian heresy of the impersonality of the Holy Spirit. The whole expansion of the article on the Holy Spirit was added by the council of 381, save one historic clause which must be referred to later, and was designed to make explicit the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit. (3) To strengthen the affirmation of the atonement: "Crucified for us." (4) To omit what was manifestly unnecessary. Thus "God of God" was left out in 381 because it was implied in "very God of very God," but the omitted phrase has been brought back into the text now used.

By far the most famous point of difference, however, between the original and the received form of the Nicene Creed was not introduced by the œcumenical council referred to. In the article on the Holy Spirit the received form reads: "Who

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

proceedeth from the Father and the Son." The last three words of this clause (Latin, *Filioque*) seem to have been added two full centuries later than 381, at the council of Toledo, in Spain, 589. The motive of the *Filioque* addition was to remove finally every taint of Arianism. If the Divine Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*, then the Son and by implication the Holy Spirit belong to that side of reality which we call God. They do not belong to the realm of the creatures. This addition, therefore, could never be accepted by an Arian or even a semi-Arian. But a tinge of Arianism has been a mark of Eastern theology from Origen right down to the present day. A Monarchian view of God, which means a strict and static monotheism, has so dominated the Christianity of the Eastern Church that its thinkers have always tended to emphasise the subordination of the Son to the Father. It hardly needs to be said that the Greek Church of to-day omits *Filioque* from the Nicene Creed. That creed indeed, and not the Apostles' Creed, is the authoritative œcumenical standard of the Greek Church, but the received form of the creed within that Church is the form in which it left the hands of the council of Constantinople in 381.

Only one thing more calls for remark here. The council of 381 dropped the anathema from the creed of 325. This is a further illustration of the desire of that council to recover the spirit and

THE NICENE CREED

language of the Apostles' Creed and of Scripture. As the fourth century advanced, a more genial temper crept over the Church, and the better spirit is reflected in the decisions of the council of 381. This suggests that the Orthodox Church of Russia has been well guided in giving the high place which it does to the creed of that council.

CHAPTER VI

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood ; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body ; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood ; in all things like unto us, without sin ; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the manhood ; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably* ; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

How is a Christian to think about his Saviour ? By the nature of Christianity itself as well as under pressure of the instinct to reflect, the Church was obliged to take up that question seriously and soon, and provide the best answer in its power. It had only answered half of the question at Nicæa in 325,

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

this, namely: Are we to think of Jesus as truly *God*? Nicæa answered with an emphatic affirmative. But it by no means follows that an answer to half a question is half of the answer to the whole question. Sometimes the validity of an answer depends upon the question being treated as a whole. In any case, it seems plain that our final attitude to the question: Is Jesus truly *God*? must in some way involve our attitude to the question: Is Jesus truly *man*? It was perhaps inevitable, once reflection was thoroughly awake, that the former question should be the first to press upon the Church's mind. If so, it was equally inevitable that the latter question should follow hard after. That represents the actual order of history. And in the light of our principle that a question is not properly touched until it is grasped in its entirety, we are entitled to say that it was only after the council of Nicæa in 325 that Christology really began.

Christology, the doctrine of the Person of Christ, had its pioneer, so far as systematic theology is concerned, in Apollinaris, Bishop of Laodicea (died 390 A.D.). This clear thinker of the school of Antioch laid down as his first principle that the God-man cannot be the union of two entirely complete beings—one who is truly and completely God, and one who is truly and completely man. Then he went on to develop the doctrine that the God-man was the union of the Logos, who was truly God, with the soul and body of a man, who was

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

therefore not completely man. Man was spirit, soul, and body ; and the divine Logos was the spirit of the God-man, Christ Jesus. Apollinaris stoutly maintained that all this was a legitimate development from the Nicene decisions of 325, but he was condemned, and his theories were repudiated by the Church. There are many crudities in his thought, but there is much that is profound and permanent. Specially valuable is his thought of "an eternal determination of the divine towards the human," with the complementary thought that "the human seeks towards the divine." Besides, he was the first to state the whole question clearly, and for this the whole Church is his debtor. Shorn of its crudities, his Christology still rules the mind of the Eastern Church, while its influence upon the Churches of the West is very great.

Apollinaris suffered as many another pioneer has had to do, but the question as he stated it was taken up in earnest by the Church. Soon two extremes of doctrine began to manifest themselves, one associated with the name of Nestorius of Constantinople, the other with the name of Eutyches of Alexandria. These two men were condemned as heretics, but, strange to say, their doctrines were less condemned than themselves. They were simply scape-goats whose only fault, if fault there was, lay in their stating clearly and strongly what most other people believed. They belonged to two rival schools, Antioch and Alexandria. These schools had for

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

long been rivals in method ; Antioch being Aristotelian and literal ; Alexandria, Platonic and allegorising. Now they were also rivals in Christology. Antioch started with the "two natures" of Christ, as distinct from each other, and proceeded to inquire how these two natures could have come together in one Person. On the whole, its answer was that the union could only be a moral union and that Christ was a perfectly God-filled man. The tendency here was in the direction of unitarianism, although the emphasis upon the ethical factor was all to the good. Alexandria, on the other hand, founded upon the unity of the Person of Christ, and went on to ask about the distinctions which were transcended in that unity. Its answer here was vague and various ; but if we take Cyril of Alexandria as the leading representative of his school at that time, the typical answer was that the two natures were only theoretically distinct. The tendency of this school was towards docetism—the doctrine that the humanity of Christ was only apparent—though the leading representatives were strong in their assertions of the manhood of Christ. Its merit was that it clung, as its earlier hero Athanasius had done, to the religious centre of the question, this namely, that Christ must be adequate to be our Redeemer.

Nestorius, who was Bishop of Constantinople and a preacher of great eloquence, was a thorough-going representative of the school of Antioch.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Eutyches, of the school of Alexandria, seems to have been devoid of the arts of ecclesiastical diplomacy so sedulously practised at the time. He spoke out ingenuously what his school taught regarding the Person of Christ, holding it as the truth and believing that the truth must prevail. Nestorius was an equally fearless advocate of the tenets of his own school. It would be irrelevant to our purpose to discuss the two Christologies in detail. But it is a fair summary to say that Nestorius, starting from the two distinct natures in Christ, did not succeed in deducing from these the One Person; while Eutyches, starting from the One Person, found it impossible to deduce the two natures. What the two controversies, known as the Nestorian and the Eutychian or Monophysite, seemed to bring out was this: start from the two natures and you end with two persons; start from one person and you end with one nature. The Church ultimately pronounced both these positions to be heretical; but what is of interest at the moment is that each, given its own starting-point, is a logical deduction from the Nicene Creed. Practically all depends upon the starting-point. The Nicene Creed obviously did not provide a strong enough foundation for a true Christology. The Nestorian and Eutychian controversies made that clear.

However, from our present vantage-ground it can be seen that the truth would have emerged from the conflict of views had it been allowed to do so

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

according to the spontaneous law of truth. We have already found reason to believe that a sweeter temper prevailed in the Church at the close of the fourth century than in the first three stormy quarters of that century. The decisions of the council of Constantinople in 381 are evidence of this. In point of fact we can see from the history of the period that the controversy between Antioch and Alexandria *was* settling itself in the only way in which such controversies can be settled, by the free emergence of the doctrine which best fits the facts. The Alexandrian Christology was gradually and surely triumphing, and that not only in the ecclesiastical sense. It was winning its way to the heart of the Church in virtue of its inherent spiritual appeal. By the middle of the fifth century it could be called the Christology of the Eastern Church, and the way seemed to be paved for at least a concordat between East and West, when something happened which changed the whole current of affairs.

It began, as tragic things often do, in personal pique. Dioscurus of Alexandria, the leader of the party which triumphed completely at the council of Ephesus in 449, gave serious offence to Pope Leo by not reading to that council a letter which the Pope had sent for the purpose to Flavian, the Bishop of Constantinople. It happened also that this same Dioscurus was disliked by the new Emperor Marcian for having opposed his accession to the throne. The Emperor wrote to Pope Leo informing

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

him that he desired to have a council summoned to investigate the legality of the proceedings of the so-called œcumenical council held at Ephesus in 449. Leo agreed, not without some grim satisfaction at the prospect of squaring accounts with Dioscurus.

The proposed council was held at Chalcedon in 451. Time must not be spent here over its external history, but truth compels the admission that alike in its conception and in its proceedings it was a disgraceful affair. Leo's famous letter to Flavian was taken as the basis of a Christological statement to be accepted by the Eastern Church. The Imperial Commissioner presided, and, with an air of giving freedom, coerced the whole assembly. Western Christology was imposed by force upon the East. It does not matter at the moment whether that Christology was good or bad. Coercion was fatal. The Church was wounded on that October day of 451, and its wound remains open until this hour. Chalcedon stands once for all as a warning beacon against the folly of attempting to force men to believe that against which their minds or their hearts rebel.

Judging now the Symbol of Chalcedon upon its merits, we can recognise in it an earnest attempt to lay a more secure Christological foundation than that provided by the Nicene Creed. It fixes the starting-point for a Christology which shall avoid the opposite extremes of Nestorianism and Mono-

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

physitism. It forbids the attempt either to deduce the One Person from the two natures or to deduce the two natures from the One Person. It likewise forbids tampering either with the unity of the Person or with the duality of the natures. The starting-point must be TWO NATURES IN ONE PERSON, or, which is the same thing, ONE PERSON IN TWO NATURES. If words can ever guarantee that both terms of that formula shall be preserved inviolable, the Symbol of Chalcedon provides that guarantee.

This symbol, as we have seen, represents the standpoint then acknowledged by Western Christendom on the Person of Christ. The type of thought expressed in it was due chiefly to Augustine, though it has been traced back through Ambrose to Tertullian. It need not be denied that it was superior to the Alexandrian type which it superseded. It secures far better the practical religious interest which the Alexandrians had so much at heart, namely, that our thought concerning Christ should provide an adequate basis for His work of redemption. For if He was to be our Saviour it was required that He should be truly man as well as truly God. Alexandrian thought always tended to be ambiguous regarding the humanity of Jesus. Besides, it tended to a materialistic view of God through its philosophical absorption in the conception of "nature" or "substance." Western thought did a real service to Christology by insisting that the unity be found in the Person. Jesus Christ

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

who is One Person must be God and man at one and the same time.

On the other hand, while the Chalcedonian Christology formed a strong guard against heresies which had recently been rampant, it is not thereby rendered immune to criticism. To put it quite frankly, the idea of two absolutely distinct natures in One Person is neither capable of being entertained by the human mind nor true to the Jesus of history. The Western theologians said it was a mystery, and must be accepted as such. But this mystery which they asked, and even forced men to accept, is an impenetrable mystery, and the Christian religion never asks us to accept any such thing. Mystery in the New Testament is always an "open secret," something once hidden and now revealed; it may be and often is beyond our complete comprehension, but it is always shot through and through with light. The Chalcedonian mystery is of another kind. It puts the mind to confusion. After all, why should we be asked to believe that the two natures in Christ can never in any way or by any means become one? We suspect two things: (1) That the Western theologians in their thoughts about Christ lived in the atmosphere of the Old Testament rather than of the New, and thus overemphasised the gulf between God and man; and (2) that their starting-point, though more satisfactory than that of the theologians of the East, is yet not the right starting-point. We can say with assurance that if an

THE SYMBOL OF CHALCEDON

Emperor and a Pope had not committed the blunder of forcing Western thought upon the Eastern Church, not only would the Monophysite Secession have been averted, but with the growth of the spirit of charity West would have learned much from East. Let us hope that it is not too late to learn it even now.

CHAPTER VII

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

THE creeds usually dignified with the attribute *œcumenical* are three: (1) The Apostles' Creed; (2) The Nicene Creed, in its extended and received form; (3) The Athanasian Creed. Of these, only the second, and that in the form in which it emerged from the council of Constantinople in 381, ought to be regarded as the creed of the œcumenical councils. The other two are œcumenical in the sense that they are accepted by the three great divisions of Christendom. The first is the most popular in the West, the second in the East, but all three have a hold upon the reverence of the Church.

The Athanasian Creed is highly regarded by the Roman Catholic Church, by some of the Protestant Churches, notably the Church of England, and even by parts of the Greek Church. The last-named of course omit the phrase "and the Son" from the clause dealing with the procession of the Holy Spirit. The origin of this creed is little known. One thing which is certain is that it was not written by Athanasius. From the time when it first appeared it claimed to be the standard of developed

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

orthodox doctrine, and this may have been the reason for connecting it with the name of "the father of orthodoxy." It consists of forty-four Articles which fall into two distinct parts, the first twenty-eight dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity, and the remainder with the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Both parts begin and end with warning statements about the necessity of holding the Catholic faith if one wishes to be saved; the Catholic faith meaning, of course, the propositions in this creed. There is evidence that the second part had its origin in the eighth century; and that about the beginning of the ninth century some member of the strictly Augustinian school of thought prepared the first part, put the two parts together, and gave to the whole the name of *The Athanasian Creed*.

The importance of this creed for our present purpose lies in its being the culmination of Western orthodoxy. The second part is a good transcript of the Chalcedonian Symbol on the Person of Christ, with additions, in the line of *The Apostles' Creed*, as to our Lord's Death, Resurrection, Ascension, Parousia. The first part does for the doctrine of the Trinity exactly what the Symbol of Chalcedon did for the doctrine of the Person of Christ. It crystallises Western theology. Here we have the line of thought to which Augustine gave its most characteristic stamp. It is the thought that God is to be worshipped as ONE GOD IN TRINITY, AND

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

TRINITY IN UNITY. The Divine Being is one in substance and of three Persons. This is a postulate, to be accepted with all the mystery that is in it. Both terms of the postulate must be held absolutely, without any confusion or diminution. Words and clauses are heaped up in order to make it quite sure that neither the Unity of the Substance nor the Trinity of Persons shall be tampered with. God is one in three Persons, and the three Persons are in one another, each having all the fulness of the Godhead. No kind of subordination of the Son or of the Holy Spirit to the Father is to be thought of.

The same type of thought can be recognised here as in the Christology of Chalcedon, and it has the same merits and defects. It secures the conception of God against two opposite extremes of error—Tritheism and Sabellianism. Start with the three Persons in their separateness and you are more than likely to end in Tritheism. Start with the undivided unity of God, and the Trinity which you deduce will be a Trinity of aspect or mode or manifestation, and that is Sabellianism. *The Athanasian Creed* enjoins the double starting-point, The Three in One and the One in Three. It thus rules out effectively the two inveterate heresies of theology.

It needs to be pointed out, further, that this doctrine seems more impenetrable to us of to-day than it did to Augustine or even to his followers in

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

the ninth century. To us the word *person* means something different from what it meant to them. They meant by it "the centre of real life," whether in the Divine or in the human being. This was a marked advance on earlier meanings of the word, and for that advance Augustine is chiefly to be thanked. Before his time it had in the West a legal suggestion, "personation"; in the East its suggestion was philosophical, "a subject in which phenomena inhere." Augustine cleared the way for the modern conception of "personality." But inasmuch as we have advanced from the Augustinian conception of "person" we find his theological starting-point more inscrutable than he did. An absolute unity of three persons is to us a contradiction in terms.

This leads to the conclusion that for us moderns there is need, at least, for a revision of the terms of *The Athanasian Creed*. But we go further and say, as we did in reviewing the Symbol of Chalcedon, that what is wanted is a revision of the theological starting-point. It is not enough to have a starting-point which eliminates intolerable errors. We must have one which, in addition to that, commands the assent of mind and heart. It is not claimed, be it remembered, that it is possible to find an affirmation of the Trinity which shall be divested of all mystery. It is only claimed that the mystery need not be, and must not be, of the mind-paralysing type. Indeed, the most cogent objection to the old

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Western type of theology, a type which still survives in many of our modern standards, is that it tries to define the undefinable. That way lies stagnation. A doctrine of the Trinity should neither attempt nor pretend to carry us further than to a true Christian attitude of mind, and such an attitude is not engendered by the theological precision of *The Athanasian Creed*. That creed was meant to be a test of orthodoxy, and such tests have a way of falling into unsuspected heresy. The mystery of the Trinity must stand in the forefront of a Christian creed; and if the mystery is dark it must, because it is Christian, be "dark with excess of light," and not "dark, dark, irrecoverably dark, without all hope of day."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DOCTRINAL STANDARDS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

THE Roman Catholic Church adheres to the œcumenical creeds, and thus preserves a link of vital connection between itself and the other great Churches of Christendom. But to these it has added other standards of doctrine which have the effect of setting it in proud and defiant isolation from all the other Churches. These modern standards formulate all that is distinctive of the Roman Church. In a real sense they mark the beginning of that Church as we now know it. The chief among them are : (1) *The Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent*, first published in 1564 ; (2) *The Papal Decree of the Immaculate Conception of Mary*, promulgated in the year 1854 ; (3) *The Vatican Decree of the Infallibility of the Pope*, 1870.

(1) The Tridentine Creed is a carefully and skilfully constructed document, logical in its conclusions once its premises are accepted, and revealing all the dogmatism and courage which mark the spirit of the Roman Church. It consists of twenty-five sections, corresponding to the twenty-five sessions

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

of the Council which were spread over a period of more than twenty years. The decrees are the Council's pronouncements on matters of doctrine and discipline, while the canons are anathemas directed against those who question the truth or validity of the decrees. If blood and iron were always in the right we should quickly say our Amen to the whole creed of Trent.

The Council was convened in consequence of the alarming proportions assumed by the Protestant Reformation, the question being what the Church was to do in view of the disorders of the time. Briefly put, the Council's answer was twofold. The Church must put down the abuses which were perpetrated in its name and which had raised the storm at the first, such as the wholesale traffic in Indulgences; and the so-called Reformers must be told that they were heretics. The Council of Trent put the Church's house in order in these two ways, by reformation of its practice where there was glaring wrong and by resolute consolidation of its doctrine. But the movement of reform was by this time far past the stage of attacking practical abuses. It was now challenging the whole structure of the Roman Church. The Council's resolution to abolish abuses, therefore, could not be expected, and was not intended, to conciliate the leading Reformers, but was meant to be an extra buttress to fortify the tottering fabric of the Church.

It was the Tridentine consolidation of the

STANDARDS OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

Church's doctrine that most concerned the Reformers, as it does us also. The reaffirmation of the Nicene Creed was unexceptionable, but it was another matter when the Tridentine Creed proceeded to make dogmas of those very elements of current doctrine which the Reformers held most firmly to be false. Doctrines which were never hinted at either in Scripture or in the œcumenical creeds, such as the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Infallibility of the Church, the equal authority of Scripture and Tradition, Purgatory, and such like, were now to be bound on all believers as dogmas which it was anathema to question. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of these and other dogmas to which the Roman Catholic Church is committed. Underlying them all is the dogma as to the Seat of Authority in the Christian religion. It declares that Scripture and Tradition are joint authorities. But what is Tradition? If it meant the continuous operation of the Holy Spirit within the Church we should be compelled to take the dogma seriously. In point of fact some of the ablest and best men in that communion have urged their Church to come boldly forth and declare Scripture and the Living Holy Spirit to be its sole authority. Even then we should be entitled to ask whether a particular decision of a particular Church has necessarily been prompted by the Holy Spirit. We must proceed upon our Lord's promise of Divine guidance for His Church, but we must not proceed

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

upon the idea that a Church, or even *the* Church, cannot make a mistake. Churches as well as individuals have often professed that they have been led in a certain direction by the Holy Spirit when it is as clear as anything can be that it is a very different kind of spirit that has prompted them. We have to "try the spirits" as we are enjoined by the New Testament. But there is no need to pursue this argument, for the Roman Church has up till now associated itself with the more prosaic sense of *Tradition*. It stands for an alleged body of teaching, communicated by our Lord to His Apostles, not committed to writing in the pages of Scripture, but handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another. It is not denied that there was a Tradition which did not wholly find its way into the New Testament, although we can say that if the omissions included anything vital to the Gospel our faith is in a serious case. But the point is not there. Is, say, the dogma concerning the worship of the Virgin Mary a genuine Tradition, taught first by our Lord Himself to His disciples, and sent on orally by them to succeeding generations? The answer is an emphatic negative, as it also is in the case of all the distinctive dogmas of the Roman Church. Roman Catholic scholars labour to find historical foundation for their so-called Tradition, but the evidence which they adduce is its own strongest condemnation. As Professor W. P. Paterson has put it in *The Rule of Faith*, "Although the ostensible

STANDARDS OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

object is to collect evidence, the actual achievement is to collect a friendly jury." In many cases, indeed, the Roman Church abandons the search for evidence, and falls back upon the absolute authority vested in the Church. But in so doing it surrenders its own theory of the seat of authority. It has so many dogmas that when it is persecuted in one it can easily flee to another. The whole basis of the distinctive doctrines of the Tridentine Creed is contradicted both by the history and by the spirit of Christianity.

(2) The Papal Decree of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is a striking illustration of Roman Catholic mentality and method. Although the dogma was not formulated by a council but simply proclaimed by Pope Pius IX., it cannot be said that it was imposed upon the Church. It was welcomed by the Church, in Italy at least, with enthusiasm. How is that enthusiasm to be accounted for? Rome was not built in a day, and neither were the Roman dogmas. First, there was reverence for Mary, the reverence which was and is her due. Then there was something approaching adoration, and, later on, actual adoration. As the Church heightened its claims upon the faith of its people, teaching them that it was the door of salvation, the figure of Christ receded from the eyes of its members. The Church which was theoretically a medium through which men should find their Saviour became, in fact, an obstacle which blocked

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

their view of Him. There were heroic souls who did not suffer themselves to be blinded by the Church's pretensions, but the mass of the people were kept by the Church in a dim twilight. They dared not even pray to Christ. He was too far away. They could not pray to the Church, but they could pray to Mary, whom they vaguely regarded as a kind of personalisation of Mother Church. By and by it was a conviction that all the blessings of Christ must be mediated to them through Mary. Then they felt that Mary must have been always free from actual sin. Had not the great Augustine taught it long ago? Lastly, they wished to believe and came to believe that Mary must have been miraculously exempted from original sin as well, and so we have the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It is the logical outcome of the type of piety which developed through many centuries in the Western Church.

(3) The Vatican Decree of the Infallibility of the Pope completes the stately edifice. An infallible Church leads logically and inevitably to an infallible Pope. The Roman Church did not receive this dogma with the welcome which it gave to the Immaculate Conception; but it did receive it, and there it is for weal or woe. Has it any justification at all? Not in history, certainly. No one reading the New Testament with open mind could ever dream of supposing that our Lord intended His Church to have one single and absolute arbiter in

STANDARDS OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

all matters of faith and life. No one reading the history of the Church in the early centuries of its existence can imagine that the Fathers of the Church ever contemplated so extraordinary a development. The question comes in the last resort to be one of determining whether the dogma of Papal Infallibility is a development which is true to the original type and spirit of the Christian religion. We need not hesitate to say that it is a glaring contradiction of that personal spiritual freedom which is of the very essence of the Gospel. And yet God has permitted it to happen. It may be that the world as a whole is not yet fit for the responsibilities of freedom. Freedom is a rich boon, but it has many perils; and a look at the world to-day suggests that self-discipline is the chief desideratum, and that if it is not going to come by the way of freedom, then it must come by some other way if mankind is to be rescued from a lapse to something worse than barbarism. The intention of many who desired this dogma in the year 1870 was that the Church of Rome might thus stand four-square to all the winds that blow in the midst of a world threatened by many storms. It was to be a haven for souls who desired nothing so much as some visible authority in whose decisions they might find rest. This appeal will continue to tell upon a certain type of mind. But we deny that a spiritual edifice can truly stand upon any foundation which is visible. A Christian man or a Christian

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Church must build on Christ alone, and therefore we shall dare to be free. "With freedom did Christ set us free : stand fast therefore." The only way to combat the despotism of Rome is by using freedom in getting the will of God done on earth.

CHAPTER IX

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

THE Protestant Reformation was, at its heart, a great revival of personal religion. In the fifteenth century, through the instrumentality of wakeful and noble souls here and there who had vision enough to see and courage enough to declare that there was something far wrong with the Church, there were in various parts of Europe movements of the Spirit which turned out to be heralds of a mighty spring-time of the soul. Before the second decade of the sixteenth century was at an end it was known throughout Western Europe that a change of momentous consequence had begun. One half of the people were filled with a strange dread; the other half with an almost intoxicating hope. By nailing his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg on the 31st October 1517, Martin Luther struck a blow which shook half of Western Europe awake. It was already morning, of course, and some early-risers were astir, while a vast multitude of sleepers were in the mood to hear a call. The feeling in many a breast was that a bad dream was at an end and that a good day had dawned.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

It was John Tetzel and his drum that finally drove Monk Martin to the audacious step he took. But the Indulgences which Tetzel was marketing in order to raise funds for the building of St. Peter's were nothing more than the match applied to the bonfire. Luther, like many another, was already convinced beyond recall that the Church's whole system of priestcraft and penance and indulgence was off the true line and that the papacy was an iniquity. The Ninety-five Theses attacked many of the doctrines which a generation later the Council of Trent was busy reaffirming to be cherished and settled tenets of the Church. It was claimed for the Reformation that it was a return to the authentic apostolic Gospel and a substitution of a true for a false development of apostolic thought.

The Church of that day was a vast world-power, and nearly everybody as little thought of impeaching its authority as of challenging the nature of things. It said much both for the courage of the Reformers and for the inherent power of what they preached that Protestant Churches could come into being at all. It said even more for the spiritual force of the reforming movement that those Churches took hold upon the life of Europe in spite of their deplorable divisions. The Reformation spread contemporaneously from two centres—from Switzerland, under Zwingli, and from Germany, under Luther; and it was felt by all men of wisdom on both sides that the two forces must unite if any headway was to be

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

made against the almost overwhelming forces which Rome was able to bring into the field. A serious attempt was made to bring about that consummation, but it is one of the tragedies of history that the attempt failed. Luther and Zwingli agreed on nine-tenths of the points in which they both differed from Rome, and in the remaining tenth they had much in common. Yet over that fraction of a tenth they parted from one another, and Protestantism was almost from the first a house divided against itself. The question at issue was certainly one of importance—the Real Presence of Christ in His Supper. Zwingli taught a symbolical presence, but was willing to argue the matter with Luther in a friendly way. Luther believed in a real corporeal presence in the elements, and was adamant. Foremost apostle of modern freedom as he was, it cannot be doubted that bitter experience of the abuses of freedom had by this time induced in him a dread of the freedom which he loved so well. He had had to fight almost as hard against the fanaticism of the zealots as against the despotism of Rome, and Zwingli seemed to him to be a fanatic on this one vital matter. Later on, convinced by Calvin, they both came to see that there was a middle way between their opposed views, which might be truer than either of them and to which at least they could both subscribe. It was the theory of a real spiritual Presence of Christ to the faith of the partakers. But it was too late, so far as the Lutheran Church

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

was concerned. It was already committed to its founder's view, and there was no turning back. Accordingly we have two types of Protestant Churches—the *Lutheran* and the *Reformed*.

When we look steadily and solely at the faith which Romanists and Protestants hold in common, we are apt to wonder how so great a distance can have come to separate the two communions. The doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, a gospel of God which offers salvation to men through Christ, in short, all the affirmations of the œcumenical creeds, are accepted equally by both. The difference enters in connection with the manner in which the salvation offered in the Gospel is appropriated by men. The Reformers were convinced that Rome, by transforming the idea of the Church from a spiritual community to a hierarchical institution, with the consequent emphasis upon works as coequal with faith in the appropriation of salvation, had overlaid the simplicity and lost the power of the Gospel. It had obscured the uniqueness of faith in the religion of the New Testament, and by so doing had despiritualised the content itself of the Christian salvation. Grace, from being a free spiritual gift ministered to men by the Holy Spirit, had become in the Roman Church a semi-physical, semi-magical quantity, mediated to the worshipper through a priestly miracle in the Sacraments. This miraculous power of the priest and this quasi-spiritual conception of grace are the

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

two foci of all that is distinctive in the Roman system.

Against all this obscuration of the Gospel, the Reformers laid down, as their material principle, *justification through faith alone*, and as their formal principle, *the authority of Scripture alone*. In justification, the Roman system included what the Reformers, following the New Testament, called sanctification; but even when this confusion of terms is taken into the reckoning, there can be no doubt that the Church of Rome, by its doctrine of works, had displaced faith from its centrality in the Gospel. Equally, by its doctrine of Tradition, had it displaced the Scriptures from their authority as the norm of faith and life. Protestantism restored faith and the Scriptures to their rightful place as sole partners in their respective spheres. The Lutheran Church laid more stress upon the material principle of the Reformation. So long as there could be no mistake that justification came through faith alone, Lutherans were content to allow those doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome which were not in manifest contradiction to the Scriptures. It was the Judaising character of the Roman system, its tendency to make forms and works perform part of the task of faith, that was in Lutheran eyes the head and front of the offending. The Church of the Reformed, on the other hand, made more of the formal principle of the Reformation. It was thorough-going in its rejection of every

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Romish tenet which could not be immediately deduced from the revelation in Holy Scripture. It was scandalised rather by the paganising drift of Rome, the sully of the Christian Gospel with ideas and practices which were non-Christian or even anti-Christian.

It will be sufficient to look at three representative Protestant creeds, remembering that all the great Protestant Churches acknowledge the œcumenical creeds as a whole, and that those which we are now to consider are the distinctive creeds or confessions of the several Churches. We begin with

I. THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

This confession is the characteristic and authoritative symbol of the Lutheran Church. It was drawn up in the year 1530, in obedience to the command of the Emperor Charles V. that the Reformers should state explicitly what they believed. The motive of the Emperor, like that of Constantine in 325, was political rather than religious, and he was resolved to make a strong bid for peace within his Empire. The Reformers were to declare themselves; their errors were to be exposed by the theologians of the mother Church; and then force was to be used to secure uniformity. It was entrusted to Philip Melanchthon, the most scholarly and gentle of Luther's followers, to frame the *Apology*, as the Augsburg Confession was modestly

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

styled at the first. Melanchthon was faithful to the doctrines of Luther, but he was able to state them with a moderation of tone of which his impetuous leader was incapable. He was burdened with an almost overwhelming sense of responsibility, for he was well aware of his duty to affirm without ambiguity the cardinal principles of the Reformation, while at the same time he still cherished the fond hope that reconciliation with Rome was possible. This firm yet conciliatory motive explains both the strength and the weakness of the Augsburg Confession. It is a great historic document to which every succeeding Protestant Confession owes much, and is more religious and temperate in spirit than most of its successors. It breathes much of the persuasiveness of the Evangel. On the other hand, its eagerness to conciliate Rome makes it less than fair to other branches of the Reformation. It denounces as intolerable heresies, positions which many good Protestants felt it necessary to hold, while it conceded to Rome positions which were an offence to a large body of reforming sentiment. Ten years later, Melanchthon, recognising that he had been too generous to his real enemies and too ungenerous to his real friends, produced a new edition of the Augsburg Confession. This later effort, *Confessio Variata* as it was called, did something to heal the breach which he had made, but it was too late to be entirely effective. The more intolerant spirits in Lutheranism, out-Luthering

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Melanchthon and even Luther himself, declined to hold out the olive branch to any Protestants who could not or would not see eye to eye with them, and clung to the original *Confessio Invariata*.

The Augsburg Confession of 1530 is in two parts ; the first part, containing twenty-two Articles, being mainly doctrinal and constructive, the second part, containing seven Articles, being practical and critical. The first part opens with an affirmation of attachment to the Nicene Creed, and closes with a claim of consistency with the Scriptures, with the Catholic Church, and even with the Roman Church, "so far as that Church is known from those who have written." Articles IV., VII., and X. are of chief historic importance. Article IV. is of *justification*, and reads as follows : "Also they (*i.e.* the Churches, with common consent among us) teach that men can not be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works ; but are justified freely for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favour, and their sins forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death hath satisfied for our sins. This faith doth God impute for righteousness before Him" (Rom. iii. and iv.). Article VII. teaches that "the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered." Article X. teaches with regard to the Lord's Supper that "the body and blood of Christ are truly present, and are communicated to those that eat in the

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Lord's Supper." These three Articles sufficiently illustrate both the substance and the temper of all the rest. IV. and VII. declare the Protestant conceptions of faith and the Church with courage and without acrimony. X. states the Lutheran view of the Supper in the manner which is least offensive to Rome. "Those that eat in the Lord's Supper" is a manifest concession to the Romish practice of withholding the cup from the laity. Article I. of Part II. defends Communion in both kinds without absolutely condemning Communion in one kind. Part II. deals with abuses in the Roman Church, and takes care to give no more offence than is necessary.

II. THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

This confession is sufficiently representative of the symbols of the Reformed Churches, and is selected here because it is the best known of those symbols in the English-speaking world. It was prepared by an assembly of English and Scottish divines at the instance of an order from Parliament "to frame a Confession of Faith for the three kingdoms, according to the Solemn League and Covenant." The sittings of the Assembly continued through a period of two and a quarter years, and the Westminster Confession appeared in 1647. It is a document of great value, not only for its own intrinsic worth, but also as a landmark of contro-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

versies which had vexed the Church from the fourth century onwards. It is divided into thirty-three chapters, each containing a number of affirmations on a common theme. True to the Reformed emphasis, the first chapter is *Of the Holy Scripture*. Here the Westminster Confession follows the two Helvetic Confessions and the Irish Articles, but differs from the majority of Reformed Confessions, which begin, like all the greatest creeds of Christendom, with an article on God. In this respect as in others, it is the most logical and uncompromising of all the credal statements of distinctively Reformed thought.

As an illustration of the incomparable thoroughness with which the Westminster Confession carries through the Reformed scheme of doctrine, it may be noted that while it follows the Irish Articles somewhat closely both in form and in language, it departs from them in its first chapter at one important point. The first section of the Irish Articles contains the following: "All and every the Articles contained in the Nicene Creed, the Creed of Athanasius, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought firmly to be received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrant of holy Scripture." It is by no accident that the Westminster Confession omits all reference to the three œcumenical creeds. Nor is it its intention to deny any of the teaching of these creeds, for it proceeds in its second chapter, with

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

considerable and legitimate freedom, to recapitulate their doctrine of God. The omission is due to the express desire to make it plain that the Church must avoid the very appearance of allowing any human document to come between it and its fountainhead of revealed truth in the Holy Scripture. Our supreme standard, it seems to say, is the Bible, not the Bible *and the œcumenical creeds*, even though those creeds "may be proved by most certain warrant of holy Scripture."

The absoluteness of Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and life is qualified by the Westminster Confession in two ways. (1) Scripture must be interpreted by itself. This not only forbids the presumption with which a Church may set itself up as an equal in authority to the Scripture which it interprets. It means that where there is a difficulty or dubiety in Scripture, the solution must be sought in those parts of Scripture which are more clear. But this implies that Scripture itself may require some standard of interpretation. There is a rule within the rule. A qualification of this kind needs to be worked out more thoroughly than the framers of the Westminster Confession seem to have contemplated, for it is manifest that it may readily carry one a long way. (2) The Scripture is authoritative only as it is borne home to a man by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Here, again, is a qualification which raises serious questions. If, for example, the Roman Church chooses to say, as indeed it has said,

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

that the Holy Spirit testifies to the primacy of Peter through Matt. xvi. 18, by what further rule is its assertion to be tested? That the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the truth of Scripture is real and vital is not denied, but neither is it denied that both Churches and individuals have sometimes made mistakes about it. These two qualifications seem to demand, if the supreme authority of Scripture is to have any real meaning and application, that the rule within the rule should be explicitly stated. After all, it may be that at this point the Lutheran Church has shown more penetration than the Reformed in stressing the material rather than the formal principle of the Reformation. Lutheranism discovers the rule within the rule in the truth of justification through faith alone, and by that rule everything, even in Scripture, is tested. Some rule within Scripture there must be, but whether the Lutheran rule is adequate to its task is another question.

While the qualifications above noted absolve the Westminster Confession from the charge of trying to rear a spiritual structure upon a foundation which is visible and tangible, they do not rescue it from complicity in a view of the Bible which is not the Bible's view of itself. The seventeenth century, especially in the circle of the Reformed, was marked by a hard form of scholasticism which was as bent on applying Aristotelian logic to Protestant principles, as mediæval scholasticism was on applying

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

it to the general contents of the faith. It had become clear by this time that the Roman Church possessed a tactical and popular advantage in being able to point to an indubitable final authority. There, it said in effect, is an infallible Church ; give mind and heart and will and all that is within you to that nurse and guardian and support, and you are safe. Protestantism had no appeal which could be so easily understood by people who could not or would not think, or by those whose minds were paralysed by religious uncertainty. Why not set up the Bible as a rival in infallibility to the Roman Church ? The desire to find an external, concrete support for the life of the spirit, a support which would readily appeal to the plain man, was a motive which undoubtedly lent its weight to the obvious suitability of the Bible for the purpose. There emerged in consequence, within the Church of the Reformed, a theory of Scripture which Reformers like Luther and Zwingli would never have endorsed. For practical purposes an infallible Bible was substituted for an infallible Church. The Westminster Confession admits that this scholastic position cannot be maintained in any absolute fashion. All the same, it holds to the position in form.

The question of the place of Holy Scripture in the Christian religion is one to which more profound and dispassionate attention has been given during the past century than at any previous time,

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

and it is not too much to say that the refusal to accept any light which has come upon the question is a practical denial of the Holy Spirit's operations in the mind of the Church. It is enough here to ask whether we can ascertain from Scripture itself what was our Lord's mind about Scripture. In Matt. v. 17 we find Him telling His disciples, in a tone which suggests that their minds needed to be reined in upon this subject, that He came not to abolish the Scriptures—the Old Testament, of course—but to fulfil them. Then He proceeds to say what is meant by fulfilment. The fulfilment of prophecy was easily understood and could be taken for granted, but what about the law? He gives five illustrations to show what is meant by the fulfilment of the law, thus incidentally indicating the importance which He attached to the subject. Fulfilling the law means not only getting at its inner spirit and intention, but also carrying that intention on to its goal. It is far more than obeying the law; it is translating its spirit into life. It is not always recognised as it should be that it is our Lord's claim that *He Himself* fulfils the law. Matt. v. 17 is often read as if it declared that Christ came in order that *men* might be enabled to fulfil it. It is He who, by His own word and in His own Person, is to bring the law out in its true colours. The formula repeated in the illustrations: "But I say unto you," emphasises this point. Old Testament law, like Old Testament prophecy, has all the time

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

been but a finger pointing forward to Him. The desire of Israel has come at last. It is nothing short of this, that the law is now to pass "in music out of sight." It is to be gathered up and made alive in a Person, Jesus. Henceforth God's people are not to be the people of a law or of a book; they are to be men and women in Christ Jesus.

So much for the Old Testament, but what about the New? It is manifest that it must not be treated in exactly the same way, for an entirely new factor has emerged. Here we have to do with first-hand testimony to the goal of revelation, and such testimony must have a unique place in the Christian religion. Fulfilling the law of Christ, which forms the perennial Christian task, must be interpreted in a different sense from Christ's fulfilling of Jewish law. The law of Christ is a spirit, a personal will, which it is our duty and privilege to apply to every realm of our own life and, as much as in us lies, to the whole life of the world. That is the application and expansion of a spirit already present. The historical fount and origin of that spirit is Jesus. Or rather, to speak in the language of religion and of the Bible, "The Lord is the Spirit." Authentic testimony to the Jesus of history must therefore occupy an organic place in the Christian scheme.

And yet even the New Testament can be accorded a place other than its own in the proportion of the faith. The Westminster Confession, in its first

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

paragraph, is so eager to urge the necessity and uniqueness of the Holy Scripture that it commits itself to what is at least a misleading statement. The paragraph in question ends with the words : "Those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased." These words surely convey the impression that the Holy Spirit is somehow less communicative with the Church now than in the days of the Church's infancy, and that too of set purpose. Of course, they are right in so far as they safeguard the position that the New Testament cannot be added to or rewritten. But they state too much. They direct the eye backward instead of upward, encourage the fatal notion that supernatural religion belongs to a by-past age, and chill the ardour of those who would proceed upon the belief that all things are possible to faith even now. It is both possible and necessary to declare that the historical character of the Christian religion demands an authentic historical testimony which shall be normative alike in spirit and in facts. It needs to be maintained that the New Testament is preeminently testimony of this kind. But it ought never to be suggested that God meant more to His Church at any time than He can mean to-day.

We sum up the Westminster doctrine of Scripture by saying that it is not scriptural enough. It is good to remember that the Christian Church was nearly a generation in existence, and had achieved some of its most signal triumphs, before a single

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

book of the New Testament was written. The New Testament was one outcome of that river of life which flowed from the Cross and the empty Tomb and Pentecost. It is an overflow from that river, and it reveals the divine character of its origin. But the river itself must be more than any outcome of it. The New Testament, which was not required in the first generation of the Church, is an absolute necessity to the Church of to-day. But on that very account we must beware where we place it. We are people not of a book but of Christ; and therefore, whatever the canons of logic or the exigencies of controversy may suggest, we are justified in holding that a Christian creed ought not to start with a doctrine of the Book but with a doctrine which is more fundamental than that or any other: *I believe in God.*

The Westminster doctrine of election must now be looked at for a little. Not only in the prominence given to it but also in its remorseless logic, it is characteristic. "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished." The Westminster Confession carries this scheme the whole way through, even to children dying in infancy. A dis-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

cussion of this doctrine would occupy a book by itself. The least that can be said about it here is that it is true neither to Scripture nor to reason. It is admitted that a vital religious interest is conserved by it. They who are effectually called, and know themselves to be so, enjoy a sense of security such as ought to belong to the people of God. But what about the agonising fears of those who, whether from temperament or otherwise, think they have reason to doubt whether they are indeed among the "certain and definite" number of the elect? And what about the hard logical corollary that all the rest of the race are irrevocably doomed from the start? If this doctrine were seriously believed by any Church it would petrify the whole spiritual energy of that Church. But a merciful thing happens. Common sense and a kindlier thought of God come to the rescue of the average man and restore for him the balance of truth. Often, unfortunately, the rescue which they bring him is not salvation at all. It is more than possible that the inevitable recoil from the intolerable doctrine of reprobation has played its own part in producing the recklessness which marks our modern age.

The Westminster Confession, after pronouncing on Scripture and on God, proceeds in the third chapter to deal with God's eternal decree. The presumption is that this decree is deduced wholly from Scripture, and we have the right to ask whether

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

the deduction is valid. Let us confine ourselves here to those principles of scriptural interpretation which are laid down in Chapter I. Here on the one hand are passages of Scripture which seem to point to a doctrine of election, and here are others which declare, without ambiguity, that God wills that all men should be saved. Which set of passages speaks more clearly? The Westminster Confession answers: The predestination passages. It follows that those which speak in a seemingly different sense must be interpreted in the light of God's eternal decree. God's will that all men should be saved must be interpreted by His eternal decree that some shall not be saved. We submit that this way of thinking is foreign to the spirit of the Bible.

The scriptural nucleus of a doctrine of election is to be found in a Christian man's confidence in God. Everyone who is being saved has access to the conviction that his salvation is of God. This is a primary and basal element in the Christian consciousness. Moreover, the redemption which is in Christ is so rich a boon to the recipient that it is impossible for him to regard either the Cross of Christ or its application to his peculiar need as being in the nature of an afterthought. It all belongs to the timeless world of the eternal: "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. i. 4, 5). That is essentially Christian of course; but when we pass to the alleged inference that because we have been objects of divine election others must have been objects of divine reprobation from all eternity, we are guilty of a kind of logic which the Bible heartily condemns. Judaism argued that the election of Israel to the favour of Jehovah implied the rejection of other nations. The prophets denounced such logic, proclaiming that election is with a view to service and not to monopoly. Is that not the whole idea of the book of *Jonah*? Israel was chosen in order that it might lead the world to God. Election for service is the consistent idea of the Bible. The supposed scriptural classic for the doctrine of reprobation is in Rom. ix.-xi., where St. Paul wrestles with the problem raised by Israel's rejection of Christ. But even there it is the thought of service that prevails and drives the Apostle to the hope "that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved." If we are going to build any doctrine on these three chapters of *Romans*, it should be the doctrine of universalism; but it would be foolish to build even that. These are great chapters, affording us a revelation of the Apostle's heart even more than of his mind; but, so far as the Gospel which he preached is concerned, they belong only to his *obiter dicta*.

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

To sum up, the doctrine of an eternal decree involving reprobation, as taught in the Westminster Confession, cannot live in the atmosphere of the Bible. The idea that God "foreordains whatsoever comes to pass" represents a paralysing fatalism which reason, conscience, and Scripture unite in denying. Our Lord taught His disciples to pray: "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Surely He does not mock us in putting this prayer into our lips. We cling to the three-fold logic of that prayer: (1) There is a realm where God's will is all fulfilled; (2) His will is *not* all fulfilled on earth; (3) His will *can* be done on earth. There is a deep truth in Calvinism, a truth which is also deeply imbedded in the Bible, but the Westminster Confession has not caught its secret. The doctrine of the covenants, with which the same confession operates a little farther on, tends to soften the asperity of the doctrine of the eternal decree; but whether they have been successfully blended is open to serious question.

III. THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES

The Church of England professes to stand in a place by itself, to belong to neither Lutheran nor Reformed, and to be mediating and Catholic. It is at once comprehensive in doctrine, giving hospitality to modes of thought which sometimes contradict one another, and exclusive in government,

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

refusing the hospitality of its pulpits to all who are not ordained according to its own rule. For nearly four centuries it has exercised a powerful influence in moulding English character and history; and, while its internal disruptive forces tend from time to time to break out into activity, it has succeeded marvellously in preserving its formal unity.

In view of its claim to be neither Lutheran nor Reformed, we must take a look at its approved standards of doctrine, and accordingly we select its principal distinctive standard, the Thirty-nine Articles. This document has an interesting history. The English edition appeared first in 1571, but the Latin edition dates from 1563. It is a recension of the Forty-two Articles of 1553, which, in turn, were a revision and enlargement of the Thirteen Articles of 1538. It seems strange to an innocent observer that the Thirty-nine Articles should be capable of so many diverse interpretations as are actually given to them within the Church of England. Extreme High Churchmen have sometimes professed to see in them neither Lutheranism nor Calvinism; Arminians have been blind to the Calvinism; and Calvinists have seen little else than the Calvinism. One has the suspicion that all this confusion is due less to the ambiguity of the Articles than to the preferences of the interpreters. It is significant that historians outside the Church of England are pretty well agreed that the Thirty-nine Articles belong

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

unequivocally to the Reformed type. We take their view of the case.

If anyone thinks the doctrinal complexion of the Articles ambiguous on the face of them, he should be satisfied with an appeal to their history. The Thirteen Articles, out of which the Thirty-nine Articles grew, were professedly and entirely Lutheran. They are a brief transcript of the thought and language of the Augsburg Confession. But with the exception of Article VII., *of the Eucharist*, there is nothing in them to which a Calvinist would have any difficulty in subscribing. By the time the Forty-two Articles came to be prepared in the reign of Edward VI., the influence of the Swiss Reformers had become dominant in England. A moderate Calvinism, in the form represented by Bullinger of Zurich, had been accepted by Cranmer and the leading bishops and the universities. That change is reflected in the Forty-two Articles. The original Thirteen Articles, except VII., are adhered to more or less; but the additions include the distinctive tenets of the Reformed, particularly the doctrines of Scripture and Predestination. Neither the Augsburg Confession nor the Thirteen Articles give a place to these doctrines. Ten years later, when the Thirty-nine Articles appeared, the new changes, which were not numerous, were mostly in the direction of bringing the symbol into more complete accord with the Reformed Doctrine. No. VII. of the Thirteen Articles, containing the distinctively

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Lutheran interpretation of the Lord's Supper, was transformed, in No. XXVIII. of the Thirty-nine Articles, into a strong statement of the Reformed interpretation. The process by which the Church of England was Calvinised went on at an accelerated rate after the formulation of the Thirty-nine Articles, and culminated, in 1595, in the Lambeth Articles, whose Calvinism is almost as rigorous as that of the Westminster Confession of half a century later.

The Thirty-nine Articles start in true Catholic fashion with the doctrines of God and Christ, and in Article VIII. definitely name the three œcumenical creeds as symbols "throughly to be receaved and beleued: for they may be proued by moste certayne warrauntes of holye scripture." The American Revision of 1801 significantly drops the Athanasian Creed. The Articles adopt the Augustinian doctrines of sin and grace, without exclusiveness vindicate Episcopal ordination, and profess the Erastian view of Church and State. They are strongly Protestant both in the assertion of principle and in the repudiation of Romish errors.

A word must be said on the three distinctive notes of Reformed theology as these appear in the Thirty-nine Articles. (1) The doctrine of Scripture laid down in Article VI. is clear and sufficient. "Holy Scripture conteyneth all thinges necessarie to saluation: so that whatsoeuer is not read therein, nor may be proued thereby, is not to be required of

CREEDS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

any man, that it shoulde be beleued as an article of the fayth, or be thought requisite as necessarie to saluation." Both in the position given to this Article and in the place which it assumes Scripture to occupy in the Christian scheme, the Thirty-nine Articles compare favourably with the Westminster Confession. (2) The doctrine of Predestination, which is the theme of Article XVII., is entirely scriptural. It is not encumbered with the theoretical and intolerable quasi-inferences about eternal reprobation which mar the extreme forms of Calvinism. It emphasises the "sweete, pleasaunt, and unspeakable comfort" which "our election in Christ" brings to "godly persons," and warns "curious and carnal persons" against having "continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination" as being "a most daungerous downefall," and calculated to produce either despair or recklessness. The religious value of the doctrine is thus wholly secured, and nothing more is either wanted or warranted. (3) The doctrine of the Lord's Supper, in Article XXVIII., is a complete and beautiful expression of the Reformed faith upon the subject. "It is a Sacrament of our redemption by Christes death. . . . The body of Christe is geuen, taken, and eaten in the Supper only after an heauenly and spirituall maner: And the meane whereby the body of Christe is receaued and eaten in the Supper, is fayth." Transubstantiation is explicitly condemned by the Article, and

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Consubstantiation, the Lutheran theory, is implicitly condemned. The Thirty-nine Articles and the Westminster Confession are in entire agreement on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

To sum up, with certain blemishes such as Article III. affirming that "Christe went downe into hell," the Thirty-nine Articles give an admirable summary of apostolic doctrine as it has been developed through the œcumenical creeds and the system of the Reformed Churches. It is both strong and temperate. But for two Articles, the Episcopal and the Erastian, it might have been framed by any Church of the Reformed type.

PART II

THE CHARTER OF THE CREEDS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE CREEDS AND TRUTH	101
II. THE CREEDS AND LIFE	125
III. THE CREEDS AND GROWTH	141



CHAPTER I

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

THE whole idea of creed has passed under eclipse in recent times. For two centuries a critical process has been at work, gathering momentum and prestige with every scientific achievement, and bringing about this result, among others, that no belief of any kind is any longer invested with sanctity or authority enough to shelter it from the searchlight of free inquiry. Christian faith may indeed find comfort in the reflection that it is in no worse case than scientific faith ; for the searchlight has actually been playing with disturbing effect upon the foundations of science itself. But when one's back is to the wall it is cold comfort to be told that everybody else is in the same plight. Our real comfort at this point resides in the conviction, which the process of time has done nothing to weaken and much to confirm, that in the midst of all the things that are shaken the Christian has access to a realm which abides. "Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

Man shall not live by criticism alone. We have

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

been through a period in which criticism has done its best and its worst. Its gains are being garnered and its extravagances and futilities are passing through the sieve. Thoughtful minds of all types are casting about for those solid foundations which some unconquerable instinct prompts us to seek and upon which alone human life can be securely and nobly built. The attempt to appraise the spirit of one's own age is always hazardous, but it would be folly to imagine that this age of ours has abandoned itself to the scepticism of despair. The same gift of reason that has put in its full claim to analyse and criticise must sooner or later put in as full a claim to build up and repair. It belongs to the law of progress in human affairs that one tendency should hold the field at a time. The critical attitude towards the fundamental things of the universe has been most in evidence for a while, and thinking men are now convinced that the turn of reconstruction is due. The eclipse which has overtaken the idea of creed is already passing.

This is not to say that there is any widespread disposition to rally to the Christian faith on the part of those who were sceptical of it. It only means that the negative forces have shot their bolt and that the positive and constructive forces have now a better chance of showing what they can do. Thought, alike in science and philosophy, is less dogmatic and contemptuous and more open and reverent than it has been for two centuries. In

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

particular, the scientific consciousness has become fully aware that its parish is not the whole world and that there may easily be aspects of reality to which its categories do not apply. It is twenty years since Alfred Russel Wallace wrote: "Of course there may be, and probably are, other universes, perhaps of other kinds of matter and subject to other laws, perhaps more like our conceptions of the ether, perhaps wholly non-material, and what we can only conceive of as spiritual." Judged by either scientific or philosophical standards, that statement is excessively faulty in form, but its substance bears witness to something like an intuition in the mind of a great experimental scientist of last generation that the field in which science works is not exhaustive of reality. To-day that intuition, endorsed by philosophy, has grown to be a clear and compelling conviction with many. The universe is one, and it is far vaster and better ordered than the wisdom of this world knows.

But the vision of a larger and grander universe than comes within the range of scientific observation and generalisation is still for the most part confined to the pioneers. It takes time for the original ideas which are drawn from the deep wells by the aristocracy of the mind to filter down to the man in the street, with the result that the mental stock-in-trade of an age is always about a generation behind. The general mind of to-day can hardly

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

be said to be even touched by the intellectual movements which are so marked a feature of the best scientific thought. Thus it is common to find men, long accustomed to boast of their emancipation from "effete superstitions," calmly assuming that science has long ago administered the decisive blow to the foundations upon which historical Christianity rests. Not for a moment will they listen to anything that can be said for the possibility of such an event as the Resurrection of Jesus. It is of no interest to them to consider either the character of the witnesses or the nature of the testimony borne by these witnesses. Historical testimony is without value to them when it collides with what they are pleased to regard as a fixed pronouncement of science. Science has said, so they think, that such an event can never have taken place, and there is an end of it. In point of fact, science has never said anything of the kind. Many scientific men have said it, but many of equal scientific authority have denied it. Our point at the moment is that, in spite of the undogmatic mood of modern pioneers of science, the common mind is still wedded to the dogma that the universe is a closed system; that this system is shut, bolted, and barred by the operation of natural law; and that natural law, which is supposed to be wholly understood by science, can in no case be added to or superseded. This dogma still constitutes for many people a preliminary barrier to

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

their acceptance of any creed which can be called Christian.

It may be confidently anticipated that this barrier which the wisdom of the world has erected between the common mind and acceptance of the Christian faith will gradually crumble before the onset of those more worthy and generous ideas which are marching forth from the headquarters of science itself. The great universe of God, the only universe there is, keeps breaking in upon the little prisons in which men have confined themselves, like sunlight through newly-made chinks. As Professor A. G. Hogg has pointed out in his recent book, *Redemption from this World*, the true view of miracle is not that it is a violation of natural law, but that it is the breaking down of some artificial barrier, intellectual or moral, which we have erected between us and those omnipotent, benevolent forces of the universe which would fain come to our aid. It would be out of place here to attempt a vindication of miracle on scientific grounds. Even if such a vindication were possible, and we venture to think that it is so, it may be that the Church's first duty with regard to miracles is to prove them by doing them. By far the best apologetic of Christianity is to put Christianity in action. David Livingstone in the heart of Africa is better than the whole science of apologetics. But our present purpose requires that we should outline the attitude which a Christian man may

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

take to miracle in full view of the methods and results of science.

To say that the universe is closed by natural law, as presently ascertained, is equivalent to saying that reality is bound by an abstraction. For natural law is nothing more than a convenient abstraction. Reality must be, at the very least, an organism, with mutually related parts, the whole being somehow in every part, and the part in the whole. Reality must be a thing of varying degrees, and it must have a heart. Take, for instance, the law of gravitation. It has its place in reality, whatever that place may be, but no one pretends that it brings you anywhere near to the heart of reality. There is no life-blood in it. It sends no one into raptures. Even if it held universally, which is questionable, it would still be nothing more than a formula. Like all propositions which compel assent independently of moral considerations, its place is on the fringe of reality. To get nearer the heart of the nature of things we must rise to the realm of personal relations. Christianity must be right in pointing to the Will of God as the true definition of reality. Human personality provides a clue to the conception of reality, and therefore the heart of reality must be God, the Perfect Personality.

The doctrine of human free-will, that God has entrusted man with a margin of real freedom involving responsibility, is essential not only to

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

religion and morality but also to an adequate conception of reality. It means that we cannot say of anything in which man is involved that it is entirely real, or that it wholly represents the Will of God, until man has completely played his part in the matter. Fatalism, whether it is held in the religious or in the purely intellectual interest, asserts that the Will of God is identically equal to all that happens, and no denial of that identity is so complete as that which Christianity offers to it. This is not to say that God is out of all relation to that margin in which man is entrusted with freedom. Any *imperium in imperio* raises difficult questions, and the difficulty reaches its climax in the conception of a finite will within the Will of God. But this is not only a conception; it is a fact, and on this fact we are bound, not only as Christians, but as rational and moral beings, to take our stand. There is a type of resignation which masquerades as a Christian grace, but which is nothing better than the hiding of one's talent in the earth and a betrayal of the Lord. It is a denial of the God and Father of Jesus. No one is entitled to assume that anything in his own life, or even in the whole universe, is the Will of God at that point, unless he can say with conviction that there, not only he, but all mankind as well, have perfectly fulfilled the trust which God has committed to them. The man in the parable who hid his master's talent in the ground is the representative of all those who thwart the

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Will of God by not doing the one thing which it is their business to do. God achieves His Will on earth wherever, by the venture of faith, we go forward and do what He has entrusted us to do. The success which He gives is conditioned by our venturing faith. Failure is born of fear or indolence or pride or blindness, all contraries to faith. Faith opens the door, or rather it sees that the door is not shut, to boundless resources. Unfaithfulness, behind its closed doors, brings doom upon itself.

Were the whole human race to work together with God for the achievement of His Will on earth, life would become so different from what it is that imagination cannot picture what it would be like. We should then have a true key to interpret heaven. Were even the Church to fulfil its trust of faith and love, we may well believe that miracles of the kind which strew the pages of the New Testament would become normal manifestations of the Church's life. At all events, the Christian is not surprised that when One came to earth who walked in the Will of God without stumbling, His life was one transcendent miracle. It is noteworthy that the Fourth Evangelist calls the mighty works of Jesus, not *miracles*, things to be wondered at, but *signs*, intimations of that order of reality to which He belonged as the Son, an order in which resources unknown to the wisdom of this world are at the disposal of those who have received the Spirit of

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

the Son, walk all the time with the Father, and are never without the grasp of His hand.

The barrier erected in name of the science of a previous age stops many in our time at the threshold. The philosophical barrier affects fewer people, but it is not less serious for those who come up against it. The offence here, in its most general form, is that Christianity sets certain *events* in a fundamental place in the scheme of things. The Resurrection of Jesus, even if science admitted the possibility of it, was only an event. The death of Jesus, or the life of Jesus on earth, belonged to the order of events, and why should any event, occurring at one period of time, be given a fundamental place in the universal order? It was for long a dictum of philosophy that an event is necessarily contingent, of no more than local and temporary moment, while ideas alone are universal, transcending time and space. Faith has usually found it hard to deal rationally with this barrier, and has fallen back upon its own intuition that the historical fact of Christ *has* a universal bearing.

The Christian may adhere to his intuition with an easy mind. For the course of modern thought is challenging the facile assumption as to what is contingent and what is universal. Ideas are, like the laws of nature though in a different sense, abstractions. They have no existence apart from personality. To say that ideas exist in their own right is like saying that art is for art's sake, which is

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

to utter words without meaning. Art and ideas exist only in and for personality. Here again it is becoming increasingly plain that you cannot get near to the heart of reality, or, to use the much better language of the Bible, you cannot understand what the Will of God is, until you give personality its due and deal earnestly with the personal relation between God and man. We have to keep reminding ourselves that God entrusts us with an area of freedom, a field in which we bear a real responsibility for having the Will of God done, and that, in the present economy which is the only one we bear any responsibility for, His Will only emerges on earth as we do our part. Of course, His is always the supreme part, but He can be trusted to do it when we do ours. Our faithfulness at any point is a condition of His achievement of His Will there and then. An event in which God expresses His Will perfectly, in which, that is to say, He finds the full co-operation which He requires from man, is something which no philosophy can persuade us to subordinate to ideas of any kind. Such an event will have the very life-blood of reality in it.

Philosophy tends to demolish the barriers which it has itself set up. The worst of it is that it keeps erecting new ones in place of the old. That is characteristic of the whole path of human progress. New barriers, however, can be dealt with when they appear. The barrier which consists of a depreciation of *event* in comparison with *idea*, which exalts

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

abstractions at the expense of history, is destined to yield to the pressure which comes from a sounder sense of what reality is. Event is coming to its own. For us men it is as impossible to lay hold of reality by the contemplation of pure ideas as it is to grasp a substance by toying with the shadow. Of course there are events and events. We should expect them to differ from one another as far as east is from the west. They vary from the intensely real to the dangerously counterfeit. The First Epistle of John, after affirming in a series of hammer-blows where the heart of reality lies, ends significantly with the warning: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." An idol is the counterfeit of reality. Events may be regarded as forming a series extending in opposite directions from an imaginary point, a zero which is neutral to reality. In the positive direction there is an expanding series tending towards the perfect Will of God; in the negative direction the progress is from small idols to great. An event is most fully baptized with reality when, if we may say so, it involves both God and man to the maximum.

No one who follows the drift of this argument can suppose for a moment that there is here any disparagement of ideas. The very reverse. Ideas mean more, not less, when they are removed from their wrong place to their right place in the universal order. It cannot be of service to truth to hypostatise ideas, setting them up as independent entities.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

By such means are idols made. Ideas render their highest service when they are recognised for what they are. They are categories, forms, rules by which the mind has learned to apprehend its objects, in their right place as servants, in their wrong place as masters. It is only in an event that the idea can clothe itself in the real for us, for the reason that these earthly lives of ours are inexorably set in the time-process. Upon this time-process the eternal keeps breaking in, except where we exercise the fateful power which we have to shut it out. Which means again that the kind of event which we are looking for, the event which represents the highest degree of reality attainable on earth, is that in which the eternal and the temporal are most deeply involved together. We know how, in a human being, character tends to express itself in a perfectly representative act. A human life is from this point of view a continuous series of tendencies and events, the tendencies being themselves events in the sense that they are ideas realising themselves in personality. Of the larger life of the race the same description can be given. Tendencies lead to events; and events, in their turn, become points of departure either for new tendencies or for a reinforcement of the old ones, and generally for both at once.

It will shed light upon the course of thought which we have been pursuing to point out that the word *event* needs to be rescued from the arbitrariness

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

of the meaning given to it by convention and retained until lately by philosophy. The word usually denotes an occurrence which does not occupy too long a time. But what is the time-limit for an event? Until recently nobody seemed to care. The Great War is called an event because its beginning and end were more or less clearly defined. It did not last too long to be included in that category. This earth has lasted too long to be called an event. Even London, which after all is a smaller event than the earth, is not thought of as an event at all, for the simple reason that people do not remember its beginning and do not contemplate its end. But London had a beginning and will have an end; and therefore, whatever else it is, it is an event which is still proceeding. The relativity of time makes the common notion about events seem childish. For a useful study in the analysis of an event the reader is referred to *The Concept of Nature*, by Dr. A. N. Whitehead. Meanwhile, without going more fully into the general question, it is sufficient to state the conviction that events are of profound significance for the understanding of what reality is, and that the depth of this significance is to be measured by the character of the personal will which the event expresses. If there is or has been an event which expresses characteristically and jointly the Will of God and the will of man, we have there something which is of supreme consequence for the human race. An

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

event in which the eternal enters most deeply into time becomes the centre around which all human thoughts and things are meant to gather.

This discussion has been somewhat academic, but we have tried to confine ourselves to those aspects of the subject which have a practical bearing upon Christian creeds. It is not fair to forget that the modern mind is apt to be confronted by a preliminary bar to the acceptance of any Christian creed. Is it possible that Jesus can have risen from the dead? How can His death in the first century have anything to do with the forgiveness of my sins in the twentieth century? These are serious and insistent questions with many, and they must be faced by anyone who talks about creeds to-day. We have tried to indicate the general line along which the preliminary barriers can be overcome. Most certainly these barriers are man-made. The responsibility for their being there rests, not upon this individual or that, but upon the whole race. There is nobody who is not in some way affected by the spirit of the age, the only difference being that some win through to a degree of freedom from it.

The modern movement towards the rehabilitation of events helps to answer the philosophical criticism of the central place given to the death of Christ in the Christian scheme. An event, if only it be of the right sort, may carry the eternal in its bosom; and because the Cross of Christ does

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

this preeminently, it takes its place at the heart of human history. Here was One who walked from first to last according to the Will of God, who bore Himself in speech and action as One who belonged to the eternal world, in whom and through whom God could achieve His Will among men. His death was the event in which there culminated the two great tendencies of His life, two which were yet one, absolute devotion to His Father's Will and an all-enduring love to man. For Jesus the problem of the Cross, if it is permissible to speak so crudely, was how to maintain the unity of His two master-motives. The world placed a dilemma in front of Him. He must abide in the Will of God, and He must cling in love to man, but here was a race at enmity with God. The proof of that enmity was written large upon the Cross. How could He still cling to man? His love, which was also the love of God, solved the problem. Nothing but such a love could have done it. "Through an eternal spirit," in the very act of submitting Himself to the blindness and spite of men, He "offered Himself without spot to God." He achieved the supreme event, and God achieved it through Him. God and man were involved in it beyond recall. Man's sin came out in its true colours when it slew Jesus; it showed what it was in its essence and tendency, so that there is no excuse for our not knowing how black our sin is. But God's reconciling love got its perfect opportunity in Jesus.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

His Will got through to men because at length there was One on earth who was worthy to be entrusted with so stupendous a task and who fulfilled it to the end. And now across every barrier behind which men try to hide themselves from God, across the barrier which slew Him, Christ stretches out His wounded hand to all men. "Whosoever will." Other events have something of the eternal in them, but the death of Jesus is the eternal event of human history. It is misleading to say that it was a timeless event; that phrase, indeed, is a contradiction in terms. The Cross of Christ was an event in time, but there eternity filled time, and we are debtors to our Saviour for ever.

To a certain type of mind the Cross of Christ is less of an offence than His Resurrection. The Cross need be no more than a creative event in the spiritual order, but the Resurrection would be an eruption in the natural order as well, and is therefore subject to keener criticism from the average modern mind. Why a spirit-miracle should be less wonderful than a nature-miracle needs some explanation. No doubt it is partly due to the feeling that the spiritual world is less definite than the material. A large body of modern sentiment seems to tell us that we can make our theories prance in the dim shades of the spiritual without risk of serious opposition from anyone, but when we begin to take liberties in the solid realm of nature we must expect

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

to be pulled up. To many, the spiritual stands for the unknown, the natural for the known. This theory of the universe cannot stand a moment's examination, but it has the advantage of simplicity and it partly explains why the Resurrection of Jesus is the chief offence to many of our day as it was to the philosophising Athenians of St. Paul's day.

There can be no doubt of this, however, that our Lord's death and His Resurrection are linked together indissolubly in the Gospel. The miracle is one. Where the heart of the miracle lies may well be beyond human power to determine. When two things are equally miraculous to us, it does not follow that both belong to the same creative order. If we were lifted to a higher plane, one of the two things referred to might be natural from our new standpoint while the other might still be in the region of miracle. Mathematics operates confidently with what it calls "degrees of infinity," just as if it knew of a reality somewhere answering to its symbols. From the standpoint of finite quantities, infinity of any degree is infinite; from the standpoint of infinity of the first degree, infinity of the second and all higher degrees is infinite; and so on *ad infinitum*, infinity rising above infinity endlessly. It is to be hoped that reality may turn out to be more soothing than these mathematical symbols promise, but all the same it seems to be posited by the very nature of intelligence that the unknown does not lie upon a dead level but has varying

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

degrees of miraculousness. Besides, to turn to a source of finer illumination, the Gospels convey the impression that our Lord found some miracles harder to perform than others. It was not only that He was hindered, as at Nazareth by the people's unbelief. Some cases, from their own nature, demanded a larger output of spiritual energy on His part than others. "This kind cometh not out but by prayer." He regarded the miracles which He wrought as well within the range of His disciples' powers through faith in Him, but some of His mighty works entailed even upon Him an extra spiritual effort. Is it not made as plain as the Gospels can make it that His Cross cost Him a much greater effort than aught else in His life? We are entitled to infer that where His spiritual agony was most intense, there His mightiest work was being done. And God raised Him from the dead. It was impossible for *Him* "to be holden" of death. If we could get men to see the miracle of "Christ and Him crucified," the miracle of His Resurrection would seem to them natural by comparison.

But the Resurrection of Jesus, which stood upon the forefront of the Apostles' testimony, stands also upon the forefront as a stumbling-block to many. That is the difficulty. We have already tried to show how the door is being opened to a recognition of the validity of miracle as a breaking in of the universal order, which is the order of reality, upon a cramped and partially unreal order in which men,

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

by the imposition of artificial limits, have imprisoned themselves. It remains to be considered how this opening door bears upon the removal of preliminary barriers to the acceptance of the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus.

We begin with the remark that what is called *matter* is not the well-ascertained thing which the popular mind supposes it to be. Matter, like other conceptions to which we have referred, is nothing more than a convenient abstraction. It is defined as that which obeys certain laws, and these laws, it is well to remember, are only partially understood. Matter *is* what matter *does*. Science limits what matter does to what it has observed matter doing, and such limitation is suitable to the immediate purposes of science. But as soon as it is said that matter can do nothing else than what it has been observed to do, an artificial limit is set up which is not even scientific. The true scientific mood is to let nature speak for herself; and while hypotheses must be framed for working purposes, it is clear that there is a tendency in the human mind to make hypotheses hinder the free speech of nature. Theories, which are meant to be means of communication with nature, are easily converted into barriers against nature. Theology has not been alone in turning dogmas into dead hands. Evolution has been the master-hypothesis of science since the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859. It is not enough to say that the law of

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

evolution is generally accepted as true ; we can do no other than think in terms of it. But the very idea of evolution is still evolving with further knowledge, and it has become plain that inadequate conceptions of evolution have been responsible for considerable misunderstandings. We venture to suggest that one of these misunderstandings, and not the least serious among them, is with regard to the destiny of matter. The popular idea, which has too often been encouraged by people speaking in the name of science, is that matter has originated in something which may conveniently be called "star-dust," something which for practical purposes may be regarded as non-material, that it has developed from its own inner resources through inorganic, organic, and conscious forms until it has culminated in the brain of man, and that finally it topples down into dust again. It would complete the circle if it went back one step further, back to "star-dust"; but nobody seems to have been dogmatic about that. This whole myth, like most others, has a nucleus of fact, but it has rendered more service to falsehood than to truth. For one thing, it is sheer materialism, which, after being discredited in theory, has a way of coming back in practice.

But the important point here is that the popular scientific idea of the origin, history, and fate of the visible universe deals a deadly blow at the theory of evolution itself. The most plausible

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

form of the idea above described is that matter has been no more than a scaffolding for spirit, and that when spirit is evolved there is nothing for the scaffolding but to be taken down. But that is not in consonance with the analogy of nature at all. Nature's scaffolding is never artificial. It is always an integral part of the building. In the main evolutionary line, lower forms do not topple down to zero when higher forms emerge. They are carried up into the higher. Nature has sometimes to resort to elimination, but its characteristic law is sublimation. Can a thoroughgoing evolutionist really reconcile himself to the thought that the universe has been swept through countless ages for the production of the body of man, the crown of the material series, only that the crown may be swept back again into nothingness? Our criticism of much of the evolutionism of to-day is that it loses confidence in itself just where it has most need and right to be confident. That loss of confidence is born of the inveterate materialism of our thinking. We can hardly help regarding matter and spirit as disparate and incommensurable, even when we know well enough that there is a subtle and intimate relation between them. And the confusion becomes worse confounded when we proceed to think of spirit as being another kind of matter.

When we come to the body of man, the relationship between spirit and matter is immeasurably rich and profound. We are still only at the threshold

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

of the investigation into the influence which mind has on body and body on mind, but we can at least say that the body is the register of the spirit, not only of the individual spirit but of the race spirit as well. If, with all this, it becomes a register of the Divine Spirit, can it really go back wholly to star-dust again? Away with the thought! The Gospel declares that it does not, and the Gospel is here, as everywhere, more reasonable than the wisdom of the world. "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep." God's finger touched Him and He slept. Yes, and again that finger touched Him and He awoke. It was the fitting sequel to the creative event of the Cross. He rose with a body which is continuous with His earthly body, yet new, changed, glorified. It was an entirely new stage in the evolutionary process. Instead of being an intellectual barrier to the acceptance of Christianity, the Resurrection of Jesus is the solution of a pressing intellectual problem, for it is the promise and pledge that this visible universe, with all its upward striving, is not in vain.

We are not asked to regard the Risen Body of Jesus as material in structure, assuming that we define matter in terms of its customary behaviour. But, as has already been observed, one persistent mark of evolution is that every new stage gathers up and garners what earlier stages have won. The God of the Resurrection is also the God of nature.

THE CREEDS AND TRUTH

“He made the stars also.” And therefore we may conclude that nothing which was of worth to the eternal in the body of our Lord’s humiliation can be missing from the body of His glory. It must still be a perfect register of the spirit, but it must be more ; it must be what His earthly body could not be, a perfect vehicle of the spirit. Through Him the Holy Spirit comes to believing hearts. We may not get farther than St. Paul takes us, but we can see the reasonableness as well as feel the inspiration of his conception of our Lord’s Spiritual Body. It is a unique fact in the universe, for it is a body which is adequate to the full life of the Spirit of God, with all the strain and conflict past. And we may cherish the expectation that before long the Church will have ceased from all timidity with regard to the full New Testament teaching on the Resurrection of our Lord, having lost all its doubts and apologies in a *Hallelujah*.

A creed can be of no possible interest to any living mind unless for that mind the affirmations of the creed are true. The first principle in the charter of the Christian creeds is the truth of the Articles which they contain. When the question is asked : Is a Christian creed possible ? our answer is : Yes ; it *is* possible, because these things which we believe are true. The idea of a belief which need have no vital connection with truth is foreign to the spirit of the Christian religion. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Christ is Himself

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

the Truth. The ultimate question about a creed is : Is it true ? and we have essayed in this chapter to illustrate how barriers may be removed which keep many in our time from a whole-hearted acceptance of the apostolic testimony to the Truth, as Truth is in Jesus.

CHAPTER II

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

NEXT to the question about the truth of a creed comes the question of its necessity. Do we really require a creed? This question is put by very different types of people and from very different motives, and we shall think first of those who assume in their question that it does not matter in the very least whether the creeds are true or not. While the idea of creed is rehabilitating itself in the forum of thought it is confronted by another antagonist which is both more sluggish and more obdurate. This enemy seems to have been in the field in all ages. We have always with us the people who count it a mark of the higher wisdom to be able to do without belief. Their creed really is: I believe that I do not need to believe anything. They profess to be able to live a good enough life without faith, or they declare that religion is not a matter of thinking. Certainly, religion is not wholly or even primarily a matter of thinking, but what they mean is that thinking does not need to enter into religion at all. The present writer, when the war in France was at its height, heard a

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

very efficient British officer declare his faith in the following terms: "My religion is that if you do not behave yourself, you get a bad time of it in this life." It was uttered with fiery heat and with the addition of several forcible adjectives which have been omitted in the quotation. But it may be taken as the most respectable form of this particular type of objection to a creed.

It is obvious that this attitude is very difficult to deal with. Thought may be answered by thought, but here you are met by contempt for all thought in the religious sphere. If you suggest that the question can hardly be one between thought and no thought but between good thought and bad, you may possibly be switched off with the reply that the determination to have no thinking in religion has been reached by a rational process. It is a kind of practical agnosticism. At one time it may have regarded religion as a useful handmaid to morality, but it has now cast it out as a bond-servant who is unworthy to associate with the free-born. It is an illustration of the principle that where religion is not first it is nowhere. This attitude of mind is not likely to be affected by argument, but we can feel ourselves upon solid ground in holding that Christian morality is inseparably bound up with the Christian religion, and that the elimination of either must imply the elimination of both. It is not to be denied that goodness bearing a certain resemblance to the Christian

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

type may coexist with indifference or even hostility to any creed, but two things may be said about it with all charity : first, that it lacks the energy, if not the quality, which Christian goodness is meant to have ; and second, that it may easily have sprung from sources which it does not acknowledge. Religion has too often been treated as young ambition treats his ladder, "scorning the base degrees by which he did ascend." The beauty of a life which has dispensed with faith is the beauty of the evening twilight. The day is drawing to a close and the night cometh.

More serious from the point of view of the present discussion is the less extreme form of the tendency to disparage thought in religion—the form, namely, which holds that religion is pure experience which is independent of thought-elements and which may even be marred or lost by reflection of any kind. It would not be fair to assert that this tendency is an essential characteristic of mysticism, but it can hardly be denied that it is at least the inclined plane of mysticism. That some mystics, including the majority of those who have most deeply influenced the life of religion, labour to give their experience a foothold in the kingdom of the mind, confirms the impression that mysticism in general is beset by the weakness of losing sight of religion as truth. It would be foolish not to see and admit with gratitude the service which mysticism has rendered to religion. It keeps reminding

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

us of the psychological fact that reflection on Christian experience, when it is made the dominant motive in the mind, may easily tend to cool and attenuate the experience itself. Christian mysticism is a standing testimony to the truth that "the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." It emphasises a psychological fact and at the same time secures a real religious interest. It is a protest against the opposite extreme which made its appearance as far back as in patristic theology, was developed through the œcumenical councils and culminated in mediæval scholasticism, of substituting assent to dogmas for living faith. The historical value of mysticism as a much-needed protest against a foolish intellectualism must be recognised. But it must be a mistake to proceed upon the assumption that religious experience is *mere* experience, in the sense of being independent of thought-elements, or even in the sense of requiring thought to be called in as a foreign but necessary ally.

For one thing, it is a matter of history that mystical experience is penetrated with doctrine. The experiences of the Hindu mystic take the form which is associated with Hindu religious thought. The mysticism of the mediæval saint is shaped and coloured by the doctrines, even the distinctive and bizarre doctrines, of mediæval Christianity. Mystical experience, whatever its source may be, passes through the mental alembic before it becomes

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

experience, and the alembic owes its character to the thought-atmosphere in which its possessor has been brought up. It is a feature of emotional revivals of religion that doctrine plays a vital part in the experiences of the converts. Doctrinal seeds previously sown in their minds at a time when they may have given them little attention suddenly sprout as with the "showers that usher in the spring and cheer the thirsty ground." Incidentally it encourages the sower of the good seed to keep on sowing even when there seems no reward for his pains. Something is happening, though it may not be apparent. One day the seed springs up and begins to grow "how knoweth not he." The labourer in the Gospel may well labour in faith and patience and hope.

Besides, history has much to say as to the fortunes of those religious movements which sit lightly by objective truth. The energy of pietism has never been long sustained, and it seems fair to infer that the reason lies in the pietistic disregard of the intellectual interest in religion. Granted that religious experience may suffer through too exclusive reflection upon itself, it is equally true that it suffers, and suffers at once, through want of reflection. If some prefer the converse proposition, that diminution of interest in the truth of religion is frequently the result rather than the cause of loss of religious experience, nothing is to be gained by denying that converse. But history is clear upon the point that

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

religious life has little staying power and can never be at its best when the mind has ceased to be alive. Subjective experience, whenever it is made the criterion of truth and not simply a verification of truth, tends either to become fanatical or to disappear altogether. It is through ideas that experience in religion propagates itself both in the individual and in society. Ideas are the principal appointed means of communication for Christianity, and their inhibition is quickly followed either by disorder or by stoppage in the current of life.

The Christian religion takes for granted that the mind requires to be engaged right through. The manner of its employment varies from point to point, but employed in some way it must be. At one time spiritual energy may be most alert in the form of feeling ; at another time in the exercise of the will ; but in the form of knowledge it can never afford to be asleep or to resign its leadership. When our Lord says : " If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching," He takes for granted that a man who wills to do the Will of God must first know something of God and of His Will. Knowing and willing act and react upon each other in the production of growth in the Christian life, each reinforcing and enhancing the other. The more we know of God the more are we in a position to fulfil His Will, and the more faithfully we fulfil His Will the more do we come to know of Him. Our Lord always taught one thing at a time, and

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

it was with the second term of this process that He was occupied in John vii. 17. But knowledge comes first. It is in virtue of this principle that preaching and testimony are accorded so central a place in the New Testament. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" The apostolic function of witnessing is set by St. Paul in organic relation to the fundamental facts of the Gospel. "All things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation." The reconciliation and its ministry must not be separated as gifts of God. Our Lord speaks more about hearing than about preaching, but hearing implies preaching. The work of the Holy Spirit in generating faith is mediated to us through the Church which is entrusted with the declaration of the Gospel of the New Testament.

Here we have both the commission and the charter of the Church, and here also we have, in part, the charter of the creeds. There is something to preach, something to hear, something to know, and it is vital to know it. In the reading or hearing or preaching of the Gospel we cannot get away from ideas, but the essential Christian ideas are not mere ideas, any more than the essential Christian experience is mere experience. The ideas we operate with are not in the abstract. They are embodied in concrete events and in character. They are

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

alive in the actions of personal wills and most of all in the forthgoing of the Will of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The Reformation principle that Christ is known, in the first instance, by what He has done is not only true to the Gospel; it is sound psychology. There is an abstract and sentimental use of the word *personality* which implies something which has little to do either with thought or action. In this sense a man is said to have personality when little more is meant than that he has pleasing manners or perhaps that he has some interesting idiosyncrasy. But personality, in the true sense of the word, is that which reveals itself in action, and deeds are the measure of it. Deeds are the first and chief revelation of character. What Christ has done for us reveals the gracious personality of God. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is first of all that favour which He has shown us and which is undeserved by us; then it is those fruits of the Spirit which grow out of that favour; and then it is the beauty of the Lord Himself, "the fairest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." The glory of Christ is full of grace, in the best Greek sense; but we cannot know it for what it is till we have seen it at Calvary. When St. Paul says: "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me," he tells incidentally what has determined his idea of the personality of Jesus. Idea, event, Person — these

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

three form the theme of Christian creed, and the greatest of these is the Person.

The challenge to the necessity for a Christian creed comes from other quarters as well. There are those who object not to doctrine but to the credal formulation of doctrine. Some of these objectors belong to the theological right and others to the left, the former fearing that formulation may compromise the essential verities of the faith, the latter that it may hinder free inquiry and produce spiritual atrophy. It may be conceded at once, not only that these two dangers exist, but that they are pitfalls into which the Church has actually fallen. Nevertheless, it must be claimed that the Church has both the right and the duty to express the revealed truths of the faith in the thought-forms of each age. This claim is based upon the general obligation under which the Church lies to confess Christ in season and out of season. It rests more particularly upon the twofold need that Christian truth be exhibited as applicable to every age as it comes along, and that Christian truth be not overlaid or distorted by subjection to the forms of any age. Dr. Johnson was fond of saying that "ideas must be expressed in some form." Even eternal truth, if it is to be received into the human mind, must be conveyed thither by a vehicle which is capable of entering the gates of the mind. It happens often, unfortunately, that the form in which an idea is expressed is elevated to the same

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

rank as the idea itself. Thus, when the Bible declares in its opening chapter that all things are of God it must use some form for the impressive and memorable conveyance of that truth, and the form which it selects is naturally the one which was most level to the understanding of the age to which the primary truth was first declared. But it has happened all too often that the temporary form has been taken for the vital thing, with the result that the elemental truth which the chapter is obviously designed to teach, namely the fact of God, is thrust into the background. And so there are many who to this day suppose that the writer of the first chapter of Genesis had for his motive our scientific enlightenment. The vehicle has been taken to be everything and its load nothing. That is intellectual tragedy. Had the inspired writer been brought up with his immediate circle of readers on our intellectual forms, he would no doubt have used such terms as evolution, atoms, electrons, ether, light-years, and so forth, and the lesson would have been still the same: *It is God that has created all*. But how glad we should be that the Bible uses the forms it does! Our modern forms would be out of date in a generation. Dr. Johnson's dictum should be taken to heart.

On the other hand, intellectual forms may be such as are not so easily separable from the ideas which they express. The vehicle and its load may be all of a piece. The load may be its own vehicle,

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

and we may expect this to be the situation when we approach the heart of things. But it is just here that the real difficulty emerges. There are those who press Dr. Johnson's dictum much further than the judicious Doctor would have allowed. For them the historical foundations of Christianity are mere temporary forms for the expression of ideas. Thus, the Resurrection of Jesus is depressed to the rank of a parable illustrating the posthumous influence of Jesus upon His Church. This way of thinking is associated with the mistaken notion about what ideas are and what place they occupy in the whole of reality. Events and persons, as we have already seen, need not be mere forms for the expression of ideas. They may be the very embodiment of ideas, and, even more, they may be the reservoir from which the ideas flow, and as such they may be of higher rank than the ideas themselves. But we should not compare events with persons, or persons with ideas, for they were never meant to be compared, and it is foolish to put asunder what God has joined together.

There is no doubt that all depends upon the Church's ability to distinguish permanent truth from passing form, that that in turn depends mainly upon spiritual insight, and that in the last resort this depends upon the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is just as little doubt that the human mind has a habit of rushing from one extreme to another, now making all forms as essential and permanent as

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

the truth they express, now treating as a form whatever it is not disposed to count as truth. It oscillates, that is to say, between superstitious belief and arbitrary subjectivism, and it is hard to say which of these heresies has been the more mischievous. It is not by such pathways that truth has ever been or ever will be reached. It is a begging of the whole question, for example, to say that the Resurrection of Jesus, even if it happened, was only an event and therefore of no more than temporary value, or that at the best it could only express some idea. That is a false way of thinking, and against it we can confidently say that, if Jesus rose from the dead, by that event there must have been unlocked universal forces of permanent value and availability for the human race. What is pertinent here is to see that if our present thought-forms decline acceptance of the event, if our vehicle will not carry the load, we cannot summarily take it for granted that all is wrong with the load and all right with the vehicle. To take that position is to claim infallibility for our present thought-forms, and such a claim is preposterous. We know that our categories of thought are not perfect. This question, at all events, is not an open one. After all, there are some matters in which it is our duty to be dogmatic, and this is one of them. The categories which up till now the human mind has learned to use in its thinking are demonstrably incomplete. Until we have reason

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

to believe that they are complete it is the humble mood that best befits us ; and when the clearer day does come we shall know too much to be proud.

Thought-forms change from age to age with the growth of knowledge, and there are many things still in the dark for the revelation of which we can wait with equanimity until our searchlights are stronger. But there are some things in human life which are not meant to remain in the dark until the slow march of human thought gives us light by which to see them. We can go much further than that and be sure that the most momentous and urgent things in human life are such as could never yield their secret to the unaided strivings of the mind. For the solution of the universal problems of character and destiny, of sin and pain and sorrow, of life and death and what may lie beyond death, of love and redemption and the life which is life indeed, for the solution of all the ultimate vital problems, the slow trek of the mind could never serve. We may exist for a while on a frail raft in mid-ocean, but it is not life, and not thus do we move towards our haven. The Christian Gospel is the best tidings that heaven can bring to earth, for it tells us that when we consent to become as little children who owe all and know that they owe all to their Father in heaven, those deep secrets of life which we have most need to know are opened to us and our souls are satisfied. The Church, in virtue of what it is, is pledged to declare and inter-


THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

pret its message to every new age, and in doing so it must see to it that the spirit of no age be allowed to rob men of their heritage in the Gospel. The Church has a word to speak from God, and it must make that word audible and articulate through all the murmur of the world.

The Church is obliged to formulate its essential beliefs in view of an indiscriminating conservatism as well as in view of a disintegrating radicalism. There are many good people whose minds lack the relevancy which puts secondary things in a secondary place. They are so eager to cling to the essentials of the faith that they cling with equal strength to anything which has even a nodding acquaintance with these essentials. Temporary forms are raised to the rank of permanent truths. The spirituality of the Christian religion is not clearly discerned, and superstition creeps in unobserved. It may be argued that so long as these good people preserve the root of the matter nothing can go far wrong with them. But a little reflection and a little experience reveal the peril to which they are exposed. In an age of criticism like ours, with its constant challenge to our religion to shew its reasonableness, it must be perilous to have one's faith dependent on elements which cannot stand the light of day. Much of the literature which gets into the hands of the people is of a kind to produce perplexity and unsettlement in the minds of those who have failed to discriminate

THE CREEDS AND LIFE

between the essential and the non-essential. Some of the literature is even designed to produce this result. It is more necessary than ever it was that Christian people should be able to give a reason for the hope which is in them. Besides, Christian faith is like gold in this respect that it does not attain its proper value until it is separated from its ore. It cannot brook accretions. Judaizing Christians of the first century, followed by Romanist Christians of to-day, taught salvation through faith *and works*. St. Paul was not satisfied with the consideration that they gave faith a place in their scheme of salvation. His penetrating eye saw that their partnership of faith and works robbed faith of its birthright. Christian truth can tolerate partners as little as it can tolerate rivals. It is incumbent upon the Church to formulate the fundamental doctrines of its faith if for no other reason than to make these doctrines stand out in their unalloyed majesty.

 In the broadest aspect of the question, creed is necessary because the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes its appeal to men through their minds. Life is more than truth, but it is a fallacy to argue that on that account truth may be relegated to a subordinate place in Christianity. That our religion is life makes it all the more impressive that our religion is truth. Truth is the sharp end of the wedge of life. Blunt it and the wedge will not go home. Nowhere is Christ more earnestly declared to be

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

the Truth than in the fourth Gospel, whose theme is eternal life through Christ. There our Lord almost seems to go out of His way in order to insist that the Holy Spirit whom He is to send to His disciples after His departure is the Spirit of Truth. "But when the Comforter, who is the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will teach you all things." The expression of this emphasis may be peculiar to the Johannine writings, but not the emphasis itself. The emphasis belongs to the apostolic tradition. And when the Church does its best to declare fully and clearly the things which it most surely believes to accompany salvation, it is true to that tradition. If the first principle in the charter of the creeds is that the things which the Church believes are true, its second principle is the Church's right and duty to declare its faith with clearness and conviction.

CHAPTER III

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

THE brief historical sketch of representative Christian creeds given in Part I. of this book brings out the fact that credal development has been accompanied by a development of the credal idea. The creeds began in a short heart-felt utterance of faith and gradually grew until they became exhaustive and reasoned statements of the positions held by the various Churches of Christendom on matters of doctrine, discipline, and government. The divisions in Christendom are responsible for the extent of this change in the idea of creed, but we have found reason to believe that the change began to take place before the apostolic age had passed away. *Jesus is Lord* was not long in being replaced by the expanded confession: I believe in God the Father, and in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit. Doctrinal definition had already begun. By the middle of the second century we come upon the Old Roman Creed with its considerable expansions of the simple Trinitarian formula. We are entitled to regard this creed as affirming what the sub-apostolic Church regarded

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

as the fundamental doctrines of the faith. So far there is no doctrinal construction. It is concerned only with the vital Christian facts, stated almost entirely in scriptural language and without any elaboration. Still it is all in the direction of further definition. When we come to the Nicene Creed of the year 325 we reach a real turning-point in the idea of creed. The religious interest is still paramount, but it is lowered in quality and tone by its alliance with speculative and political interests. The Nicene Creed represented a conscious effort to maintain vital elements of the faith against the devitalising influence of contemporary philosophy; but the consequences of that effort afford a good illustration of the difficulty of repelling philosophy without philosophising. When you are throwing stones at philosophy it is well to remember that you are living in a glass house. The Nicene formula became a new starting-point for speculative controversy. A creed was now looked upon as a test of orthodoxy, and the notion was near at hand that faith means intellectual assent to orthodox propositions.

It is well to take a good look at these two ideas of a creed. According to the first idea, the sole interest is religion. According to the second idea, the interest is divided between religion and theology. It is tempting to put these two ideas against each other as mutually exclusive alternatives. A study of the situation from which the creed of Nicæa or

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

that of Chalcedon emerged is apt to put us on the side of the Emperor Constantine in his rebuke of the eastern bishops: "You are fighting over trifles." But Constantine must not be our guide in the things of the spirit. Still more are we apt to feel like Principal Lindsay when he said of Nestorius: "He was so fiercely orthodox that he was bound to fall into heresy." But when we have passed all deserved censure upon an orthodoxy which forgets that love is enthroned in the heart of truth, we are recalled by the question as to whether religion and orthodoxy are necessarily alternatives. The answer is emphatically in the negative. Orthodoxy is right thinking, which is indispensable to right living. It is at least impossible to cut the two ideas of creed right off from one another.

Taking the Apostles' Creed as an illustration of the one idea and the Nicene Creed as an illustration of the other, the differences between them, in intention, tone, and contents, are written large upon the surface. But a deeper look reveals that the Apostles' Creed is not so non-controversial a formula as might be supposed and that the Nicene Creed has more to do with life than it seems. The Apostles' Creed is non-controversial in spirit, and that is a great thing; but what about its contents? It has an affirmation of the Virgin Birth. Presumably the Apostles' Creed regards this doctrine as an essential part of the test for membership in the Christian Church. Would St. Paul have

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

imposed that test? We have adequate reasons for holding that no Apostle did impose it. And yet here is a creed, bearing the Apostles' name, which does what the Apostles would not have approved. Clearly the use of scriptural language does not by itself raise a creed above criticism. A creed to which a man is asked to subscribe with a view to Church membership must be scriptural in emphasis as well as in language. It seems clear that in the instance adduced, the Apostles' Creed parts company with the New Testament emphasis. It need hardly be said that our main purpose here is not to criticise the Apostles' Creed but to illustrate the difficulty of preserving the analogy of the faith once the policy of definition is embarked upon.

Even so simple a symbol as the Apostles' Creed, and even its still simpler predecessor of the second century, the Old Roman Creed, are complicated enough to court questions! Why is this included? And why is that excluded? Why is there no affirmation of the Atonement? The Nicene Creed, on the other hand, is truer to the apostolic proportion. It may be "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," but it preserves something of the New Testament emphasis; and where it commits itself to intellectual construction it does so for the purpose of affirming, in the face of serious opposition, that Christ is on that side of reality which we call God. That truth is vital. To surrender it would be to evacuate the gospel. After

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

all, the Nicene Creed is concerned with supreme issues.

It would not be wise to divide the creeds into those concerned with life and those concerned with orthodoxy. It is both more charitable and more true to history to say that creeds have always been concerned with life; but that when we get beyond the simple watchwords which satisfied the needs of the infant Church, creeds tend to become landmarks of controversy, and we cannot always say that in them controversy is swallowed up of life. At the most we are only dealing with tendencies. Granting that creeds aim at preserving or defending the faith, it is useful to distinguish three magnitudes with which they operate.

(1) *Facts of History*.—Even here we must speak relatively, for there is no such thing as a bare fact in the absolute sense. But we are stating a plain fact of history when we say, for example, that Jesus was crucified. When we say that Jesus rose from the dead, we state a proposition which raises questions. But this also is an historical fact for the Christian Church.

(2) *The Religious Value of the Facts*.—Keeping to the same illustration, we say that Jesus was crucified for us. We are now in the region of Christian faith on the one hand and of the Atonement on the other. *For us* may be variously interpreted, but there can be no doubt of the religious meaning of the phrase either in the New Testament or in the general

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

experience of believers in Christ. He died to save us. Without leaving history behind, we have thus passed into the sphere of religion.

(3) *The Theory of the Religious Value of the Facts.*—Here, still carrying history and religion along with us, we pass to the realm of systematic theology. We have now to do with the intellectual interpretation of a religious interpretation of certain historical facts. Following our illustration, we reach a theory of the Atonement. What is the rationale of Christ's atoning death? Many different answers are given, but our point is that these belong to a third order of magnitude. We are not able, and we should not try, to mark off these three orders of magnitude absolutely from each other, but there is a broad distinction between them which is valuable for clearness of thought.

The New Testament supplies facts and values, but as to intellectual construction there is nothing beyond stray hints. The earlier Church symbols, like the Old Roman Creed, are content with facts and values. The change in the tradition dates from Nicæa. Intellectual forms now begin to take a place in the creeds. Current categories of thought either fill the background or even obtrude themselves upon the picture. It is always applied philosophy, of course—philosophy working upon the Christian facts and values, but its presence is unmistakable. A document, for instance, like the Westminster Confession bears upon its face the

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

marks of many controversies, all of them religious. They are over matters which concern the Christian faith, but they are waged in the intellectual arena. The philosophy of the Westminster Confession is an organic part of the whole structure. A confession like this is meant to be studied ; clearly it is not meant to be sung. We are now a long way from the ancient hallelujah : Jesus is Lord.

It is not accurate to maintain that Church creeds of the longer type represent attempts made at certain times to articulate the Christian faith with categories of thought then prevailing. That view suggests that the Church, in doubt from time to time as to the reasonableness of the faith, called in the help of philosophy in order to reassure its mind. That was certainly not the average historical situation. It seems truer to say that the historic creeds of Christendom are the recurrent challenge of the Church to the changing thought-forms of changing times. Not that the Church could ever rise wholly above the spirit of the age. We have already seen how, in repelling false philosophical constructions of the faith, it was compelled itself to adopt philosophical conceptions which can now be seen to be indefensible. But it can safely be said that on the whole the Church possessed a sound intuition as to where the kernel of the Christian faith lay. It is this consideration that inspires the conviction that the Church, through good report and ill, amid many sad mistakes and false

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

tempers, has nevertheless been under the sure guidance of One who makes no mistakes. In its creeds of the great councils it insisted on guarding the deposit against attempts at premature syntheses. The Nicene Creed is not a spontaneous endeavour to bring Christ within the limits of a definition, but a resolute assertion that if there is to be definition it must not make Christ less than what He actually is to Christian faith. The Arian and Athanasian parties at Nicæa both drew a sharp line between Creator and created, but the Arians placed Christ on the lower side of the line while their opponents placed Him on the upper side. Arianism, which represented the popular philosophy, was rejected, and the religious interest triumphed. It was Arianism that tried to explain Christ by the thought-forms of that day. The Church rejected that attempt, clung to the doctrine of Christ as Divine Redeemer, and had that doctrine incorporated in the creed as the faith of the Church. It is true that the creed involved a mystery which the Arian synthesis would have avoided, but the Church felt instinctively that a mystery with a sufficient Christ at the heart of it was better far than no mystery and no Divine Redeemer.

In Chalcedon it might seem on the surface as if the contrary principle were exemplified. Here the Alexandrians again stood for the retention of the mystery, but they were defeated. In reality they were not true to the Athanasian tradition. For

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

now they were fixing the mystery with philosophical precision. They pronounced the union of the two natures in Christ to be an impenetrable mystery. The tendency which triumphed at Chalcedon was the fruit of a surer religious intuition. It represented the conviction that the mystery of Christ cannot be impenetrable. *Mystery* in the gospel is always *an open secret*. The Church at Chalcedon pledged itself, formally at least, to the idea that the unity and the mystery were not in the two natures but in the Person, and thus the mystery of Christ was kept open, as it ought to be.

With regard to the later creeds it might seem more difficult to hold that their chief interest lay in securing the essentials of the faith rather than in squaring the faith with current thought. But the history of those documents makes it clear that the intention always was to guard the religious interest, while the documents themselves show that on the whole the intention was realised. The Tridentine Creed of the modern Roman Catholic Church repels the supposed rationalising tendencies of the Protestant Reformation and reasserts with much vehemence those positions which, resting upon Scripture and tradition, had come to be regarded in that Church as vital to the faith. The Westminster Confession counters the supposed rationalising tendencies of Arminianism with an unequivocal assertion of the absolute sovereignty of God, and condemns the Roman reliance upon tradition with

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

an equally unequivocal assertion of the supreme authority of Scripture. In all cases what were regarded as vital religious interests are secured against tendencies which were held to blur the marches of revealed truth. Generally, creeds may be said from one point of view to represent the Church's reaction against the disposition to sacrifice essential elements of the Christian faith upon the altar of intellectual construction. The Church has all along been resolved that no kind of synthesis shall be allowed to rob men of the salvation which is offered in the Gospel.

Looking now at the credal developments as a whole, we receive the impression that the Church cannot be accused of superstitious reverence for creed as such. The periodical and considerable changes which have actually taken place absolve it from the sin of symbololatry. If it has been guilty at all of that sin, it is during the last three centuries. The controversies between the various Churches have had the effect of making each jealous for its own symbols. That, however, does not explain the almost superstitious reverence which has sprung up in recent times for those creeds which were formulated by the so-called œcumenical councils. It is obvious that many in our day have a higher regard for the Nicene Creed than any member of the Nicene Council had, except perhaps one man who got all his own way at the Council. It seems a safe conjecture that those old symbols wear a halo

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

for many modern Churchmen because they are the determinations of councils of the undivided Church. They are to be revered certainly, but rather for their contents than for anything else. Not one of those councils was really œcumenical, and the histories of some of them inspire anything but reverence. In the last resort the recent affection for creeds like the Nicene must be explained by the modern rally to the Catholic idea, a phenomenon which is most marked in a section of Protestantism.

Previous to the last three centuries the Churches had no compunction in altering their creeds, adding to them, or subtracting from them, as circumstances demanded. One of the best indications of the free attitude of the Church towards its creeds is furnished by the supreme indifference shown to a published resolution of one of the œcumenical councils. That council issued a strict order that no creed other than the later Nicene was henceforth to be prepared or adopted. The order, so far as we can see, made absolutely no difference. Apart from councils altogether, the Athanasian Creed found its way to the heart of almost the whole Church. The third and fourth œcumenical councils both tried to stereotype creed and would probably have succeeded thus in inaugurating a genuine symbololatriy, but the Church in praiseworthy fashion paid no heed to them. This is only one of the many illustrations which history supplies of the truth that the

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Church as a whole was wiser than its œcumenical councils.

The Church of to-day will return to the earliest and best tradition by adopting an attitude of enlightened freedom towards its creeds. Creed calls for progressive revision. It is not suggested that it should be revised at stated times, such as every ten, twenty, or thirty years. No mechanical arrangement of that kind is appropriate in a realm which is under the control of the Spirit. But a Church should always be ready to revise its creed should the need for revision arise. Not only ready, but eager; for a creed which does not fully and accurately represent the thought and life of a Church is worse than an anachronism. It is a form of unbelief. If it is argued that a Church may easily fall on evil days, forget its first love and allow the stream of life to run low, and that such a Church is not worthy to tamper with the creed of older and better times, premises and conclusion of the argument may be admitted. But surely it is as bad an argument as can be to contend that because a Church may cease to live, therefore a living Church should be deprived of the right and absolved from the duty of revising its creed. We do not legislate for the dead but for the living. If a Church is dead it matters nothing what its creed is. As a matter of fact, in a state of death it is more likely to ignore its creed than to take the trouble to alter it. That this is what happens can be proved from history. As Milton

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

says in the *Areopagitica*, pleading for the liberty of the press: "A fool will be a fool with or without a book," so we may say that a dead Church will be a dead Church with or without a creed. It is surely the Will of Christ that His Church should be alive and that, being alive, it should express itself progressively in its creed.

It must be emphasised that we are not simply pleading for the right of a Church to modify its doctrinal standards. That right is already asserted by every Church which takes the Headship of Christ seriously. But it has become a habit with some Churches which assert that right to shrink from exercising it. It can surely be taken for granted that spiritual freedom, having been won at a great cost, ought not to be allowed to remain a bare, inoperative principle. Freedom for a Church means freedom to do the Will of Christ; and since this rich boon has been secured by the toil and sacrifice of other generations, we to whom it has been handed on have much to answer for if we do not use it. Freedom is no solution of anything. The solution comes from the faithful and courageous exercise of freedom. Spiritual freedom was won by men and women who were true and brave enough to dare to do the Will of Christ, and that Church is unworthy to be free which is content to maintain it upon any other terms.

The Church which keeps up the appearance of binding its office-bearers to a lengthy formula drawn

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

up in, say, the seventeenth century, if it has been alive since then, puts itself in a false position. If it has been a living Church the Holy Spirit must have been at work within it, and it is strange if it has not gained some understanding in the truth of God. The seventeenth-century document may be of great historic value ; it may have been exactly the document required in its own time ; it may enshrine all the vital elements of the faith ; yet even thus there is something far wrong if, after centuries, it is left to express the mind and heart of the Church. Has no new emphasis been discovered or no old one rediscovered ? Has there been no fresh vision, no advance anywhere ? We speak rightly of the Protestant Reformation as a mighty spiritual revival coming along with the rediscovery of the Bible. Now that the Bible has been rediscovered and now that it has been studied more patiently than at any time in the Church's history, have we not rediscovered anything of spiritual value since the days of the great reformers ? Most certainly we have. We do scant honour to those leaders of men by keeping rigidly to the Augsburg Confession or the Thirty-nine Articles or the Westminster Confession, without ever daring down the centuries to modify these documents by one jot or tittle.

The Church of Rome has added, and added much, in comparatively recent years to its Tridentine Creed. These additions are highly distasteful to the rest of Christendom for the reason that they are in

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

manifest contradiction to the unmistakable type of apostolic Christianity. But if the Church of Rome has exercised its freedom in what we believe to be a false direction, we are bound all the more to exercise our freedom in the direction which we believe to be true. The time has come when we should ponder well the warning of our Lord in the Parable of the Talents. The unprofitable servant did not squander his master's talent. Nor did he lose it. He simply put it in the primitive bank which yields no interest. His sin lay in doing nothing. He was condemned for not daring in his master's name. If in three centuries the Protestant Churches have learned nothing which can make any difference to the long creeds in vogue at the start of that period, it is hard to see how they can escape the doom of the unfaithful. But they have learned something, and therefore there is no excuse for not declaring it in the place which exists for just such declarations. Creeds ought to be continuously revised.

The question as to whether the same line of argument might be used for a revision of the Bible need not detain us long. The Bible is for the Christian religion the book of foundations which can never be rewritten. A new Bible might form the starting-point for a new religion, but it would not be Christianity. The idea so widely entertained that the Christian religion can be and ought to be rebuilt from the foundations in every succes-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

sive age is a compliment to the name, for it implies that the ideal religion for every age ought to be called Christian. But the idea is as foolish as it is vague and unthinking. For the perfect religion can only change if human need changes; and the man who is under the impression that the deep, elemental needs of the race have a way of changing radically from age to age, or that the things in which the ages differ from one another are more profound and impressive than the sure, immemorial marks of humanity, is a man with whom it serves no good purpose to discuss anything.

The question comes to be whether the Bible has a unique and permanent place either in the nature of things in general or in the Christian religion in particular. For our present purpose it is a sufficient reply that in the nature of things, if the Incarnation was to be, it could only be at one point of the world's history. The New Testament emerged from the highest tide of life that has visited this earth; and as every effect must have had a cause sufficient to produce it, it would be hard to find any explanation of the great tide, which can even compete with that given in the New Testament itself. Criticism has only brought the fact into bolder relief that very shortly after the death of Jesus astounding spiritual energies were disengaged in the souls of those who believed in Him. The very existence of the New Testament is the witness to those energies. It speaks for itself. It finds us, as S. T. Coleridge put

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

it, the deep in it calling to all that is deepest in us and evoking its response there. It was not accidental that the next highest tide in history rose around the rediscovery of the Bible. High spiritual tides have all the same cause, and the Bible is more than principal witness to that cause. It is an instrument in the Spirit's hand. The water of its baptism is not yet dried upon it, and in that same fountain the Church may receive its own baptism in every age. The uniqueness of the New Testament lies here that it is the testimony to Jesus given by those who were with Him in the days of His flesh and by others who came directly under their influence. The New Testament is the self-authenticating, apostolic testimony to Jesus as Saviour and Lord of all who believe on Him.

It is essential to see that the Apostles were witnesses in an incomparable sense. When the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost and abode with them through their toils and sufferings, they were able to recognise in that Spirit the very Spirit of Him whom they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears and handled with their hands. In the Holy Spirit they recognised the Other Self of Jesus, now unseen indeed, but present with them in a power unknown before. Such testimony cannot in the nature of things be borne by any other age. We can be witness-bearers to the saving power of Christ in our own lives, but we are dependent upon the original witness-bearers for the knowledge that

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

it is He and no other who is working in us. Apostolic knowledge and experience are normative and must remain so while the present order lasts. Once for all they supply the criterion and chart for those who would walk on the King's highway.

In these days of ours when it is impossible to believe every spirit, and when a false spirit is manifestly abroad, men ought to be the better prepared to welcome such a criterion as the Bible provides. To suppose that one can start out afresh to explore the eternal for oneself, as if none had been on a similar voyage of discovery before, is as crazy as the attempt to live one's life as if nobody had lived before. To ignore history and to fancy that wisdom is only beginning now is neither faith nor courage but the depth of folly. Even Jesus fed His soul on the manna of Israel. Christianity is linked irrevocably with the apostolic testimony to Jesus, and therefore that testimony must remain unchanged in the permanent record of the Bible. What we have said as to the need for a progressive testimony within the Church does not affect the permanent testimony of the Bible. Somewhere or other we must draw a line between what changes and what abides. This subject must be developed later. Meanwhile the contents of this chapter may be summed up in the faith that the Holy Spirit waits to lead the Church into all the truth as truth is in Jesus. The charter of the creeds is threefold: (1) That what they affirm is *true*; (2) that it is truth

THE CREEDS AND GROWTH

which must be *declared*, for the benefit of those who are without and for the very life of the Church itself; (3) that the Holy Spirit guides the Church into *new discoveries* in the unsearchable riches of Christ.



PART III

CREEDS FOR TO-DAY

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED	163
II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES	183
III. A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM	208
IV. RECONCILIATIONS	244



CHAPTER I

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

THE modern view of what a creed should be oscillates between the two types which we have seen to run through the history of the Church. The shorter and more scriptural utterances of early times developed into the longer and more highly constructed symbols of the later Churches. But there was something besides development. The short, original type retained its own identity apart, and declined to be absorbed in the larger and later forms. Thus most Churches, in addition to their developed sectional creeds, recognise one or other of the more Catholic creeds, like the Apostles' Creed. There is a growing feeling, especially in Protestant Churches, in favour of the simpler and earlier type. The time seems to have arrived when it should be recognised that these two types of creed have served different purposes and when some attempt should be made to travel towards the fulfilment of both tendencies.

In line with the familiar principle that a time comes in the evolutionary process when man takes a conscious part in the guidance of the process, the Church ought now to make clear to itself where

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

exactly it stands with regard to the various doctrinal standards which it accepts, and to ask seriously whether these standards are adequately filling the place assigned to them. This principle admits of a wide extension. It covers all that is meant by the seat of authority in religion, and demands particularly that Protestantism make up its mind as to the exact place which the Bible holds in Christianity and state clearly what that place is. At the moment it is sufficient to emphasise its demand that the Church be clear as to what it means when it speaks about its subordinate standards. The term subordinate standard is surely unfortunate. It is like talking of a yard-stick which is not to be absolutely relied upon for the measurement of cloth. A double standard for any one thing is dubious at the best, and may easily become intolerable. If it means, as it usually does in the Reformed Church, that it is necessary to express the sense in which the Scriptures are to be understood, then that is not a *subordinate* but an *inner* standard. It is a standard by which the Bible itself is measured and interpreted.

Not to pursue the line of criticism any further, we submit that a Church would be in the true line of advance were it to divide its creed into two well-defined symbols.

(I) ITS CONFESSION

We lay little stress upon names and much upon the thing for which the name stands. But the name

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

Confession is adopted here because it is a New Testament word and is used there for the very kind of thing of which we are thinking. "And that every tongue should confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*" (Phil. ii. 11). A Church's Confession should be such as not only it can itself witness with the whole heart but such also as with all charity it might expect any other Christian Church to witness with like wholeheartedness. It would need to be short but without attenuation of the truth which saves. To regard such a Confession as unattainable is not only to despair of the reunion of Christendom but also to deny the possibility of determining what are the essential elements in our religion. We are not permitted to sink down into such depths of pessimism. It is at least the plain duty of every Church to state, in simple and as far as possible in scriptural terms, what it holds to be the essence of its faith, having due regard to history and experience, and in the spirit of love towards all the faithful followers of Christ. It is surely a consummation devoutly to be wished and thought about and prayed for that the heart of the whole Church might lift itself up as one in a common Confession of its faith. It would be a great thing to have a short and impressive symbol of the Church's unity and a watchword for Christian folk in the midst of a distracted world. The Church which gives the lead to Christendom by providing it with the right rallying-word will deserve well of

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

all mankind by achieving something great for its Lord.

(2) ITS TESTIMONY

Again a name is not the principal thing. But *Testimony* is a good scriptural word, and it will serve if there be no better. We mean here, of course, the distinctive testimony of a Church. This would be a comprehensive statement of what a particular Church stands for in the midst of the conflict of Christian opinion. It would probably have to define more closely the contents of the Confession, and it would declare the special spiritual gains which have accrued to that Church along the road which it has marked out for itself. Every Church is entitled to demand that its members, and still more its office-bearers, and most of all its teachers, shall subscribe to its distinctive testimony. This consideration alone makes a Testimony necessary. It would be a test of orthodoxy, or rather, a test of Church loyalty; but the idea of a test would be redeemed from anything that is sinister by being bathed in a new spirit.

The importance of a change of emphasis in the Testimony, as compared with the average creed of the longer type, must be recognised. The stress would have to shift from the negative to the positive and perhaps also from theology to religion. The Testimony would not bristle against opposing errors. It would be full of conviction but free from bitter-

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

ness and the suggestion of superiority. Its mood would not be one of opposition to other Churches but of friendly co-operation with them. Were this mood to be answered by scorn or defiance, the Church of goodwill would have the honour of taking up its cross and following its Lord. In its Testimony it would in effect say to other Churches: "Here is what we have learned by walking along this path," and there would be a tacit invitation to other Churches similarly to declare their gains.

If every Church were to follow the line of its own history and convictions with the feeling of doing pioneer work for the Church Universal, the day of reunion would be near. Our approach to one another will come through the nearer approach of each to Christ. A Church is meant to be not only an instrument, but also an illustration, of the Kingdom of God among men, and, in so far as it is both, it is doing the Will of God. A Church is called to live the life of love, and it is that kind of life which must be reflected in its Testimony. Broadly speaking, the Confession would declare "the faith once delivered to the saints"; that is to say, it would stand for the permanent element in Christianity. The Testimony, on the other hand, would declare the special gifts which a Church has received from Him who distributes to all men and Churches severally as He will. It is surely high time that the Churches were coming to regard themselves not as rivals but as partners in a mighty

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

enterprise. Whatever it may have been in past days, we know now that no Church enjoys a monopoly of divine grace. The Churches need each other as members in the same congregation need one another. What one lacks, the others can supply. That is the law of the Spirit's giving, but what stops the vital current is want of love. Is it impossible for the Churches to look upon themselves as members of one family? We dare not think it impossible. We express our amazement that the nations of Europe have learned so little from the recent cataclysm. We cannot understand why they do not come together, look each other in the face, and say: "Come now and let us reason together. Let us be done with this folly." We can see how mighty are the blessings which would flow to every nation from a real confederation of all the nations. But what about the Churches? Some affect superiority over others and keep them at arm's length, and none has the love it ought to have. Do we expect the nations to be more Christian than the Churches of Christ? If these things are done in the green tree, what about the dry? The time is fully ripe for a new spirit in Christendom.

The adoption by each Church of a Confession and a Testimony, in the sense and with the intention above described, and the spread of a clear understanding about them throughout the membership of the Church, would secure several advantages which may be mentioned here.

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

(1) It would apply the teaching of history as to the functions of credal formulations in a Church. It is not an innovation. It has history behind it. The Church has all along, since the fourth century at least, been using its creeds for two purposes which are sufficiently distinct, but without a clear consciousness of the distinction. Sometimes a creed was a simple confession of personal faith; sometimes it was a test of orthodoxy. The distinction, as was pointed out in an earlier chapter of this book, was never absolute. We are dealing here, as we often have to do, with varieties in emphasis. The two tendencies run through the whole history of the creeds, and it is not unfair to describe them popularly as the tendency of the heart and the tendency of the head. The proposal to adopt a Confession and a Testimony would carry both historical tendencies to a conscious goal. A large amount of confusion would be at an end. The Church would thus be clearing its mind on an important matter concerning which it has never yet been clear. Everybody would come to understand that the Confession has to do only with the foundations of the Christian religion, and that the Testimony represents the particular line along which his own Church has come to be what it is.

(2) It would serve a useful ecclesiastical purpose. At present there is dubiety in some Churches as to what should be demanded of members, and what of office-bearers of various degrees, in the way of a

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

profession of faith and knowledge. It is recognised that more should be demanded of office-bearers, especially of the teachers of the Church, than of the rank and file of membership. But it ought also to be recognised, if it is not, that all ecclesiastical offices are functions of membership and that therefore a solemn and well-considered pledge should be required for admission to full membership. As it is, it is often left to individual ministers or pastors to use any form of words they please, which sometimes comes in practice to be whatever form of words occurs to them at the moment. That is highly unsatisfactory. Every catechumen should know beforehand the pledge which is required of him by the Church. He should have careful preparatory instruction both as to the contents of the pledge and as to all that is implied in giving it. And it goes without saying that the pledge should be premeditated and authorised by the Church.

We submit that nothing could serve the purpose of a formula of admission so well as the Church's Confession. The time when a person takes upon himself the privilege and responsibility of Church membership is the occasion for dwelling upon fundamental things. It is fitting that what is done there and then should powerfully suggest to him that he is entering the fellowship of the Church Universal, and that he is identifying himself with the faith once delivered to the saints. As to loyalty to his own particular Church, that may be

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

assumed in part by the fact that he is there, but that loyalty is best evoked by the general life of the Church and especially by systematic instruction in the Church's Testimony. The Testimony should be studied and taught in Bible classes, for it would afford the best possible approach to Bible study and would tend to keep the work of the Bible class relevant to living issues and therefore both instructive and interesting. Nor would such instruction have the effect of generating an undue denominationalism. The irenical character of the Testimony, answered by the spirit of the teacher, would be a bulwark against mere sectionalism. The class could be brought to regard itself, not only as an acquisitive society, but also as a band of pioneers who are helping their own Church, and through it the whole Church, to a deeper understanding of the things of God. There should be a little university in every congregation, a band of dedicated people who are thinking for the Kingdom of God.

Acceptance of the Testimony of the Church should be required of all office-bearers. There can be nothing in the nature of an imposition about this rule, for the Testimony represents faithfully the thought and life of one particular Church; and anyone who cannot cordially subscribe to it is not desired for office in that Church nor should he himself seek office. Declaratory Acts, giving office-bearers a margin of liberty with regard to the Testimony, would not only be needless; they

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

would be out of the question. The Confession implies that the affirmations which it makes are the things which are beyond controversy in the Christian Church. The Testimony implies that the affirmations which it makes are beyond controversy in that particular Church. It must avoid dogmatism on matters in which members of that Church may reasonably differ. It is neither a system of philosophy nor a treatise on theology, but a clear, strong, and pacific statement of the things most surely believed by that Church. Office-bearers would sign it *con amore*, as a man presumably does when he signs his own marriage certificate. Questions of imposition or relief do not arise. Incidentally it is obvious that a Church's adoption of Confession and Testimony would both simplify and dignify the procedure at ordination.

(3) It would offer a solution of the problem as to the relation of the Bible to faith. We have already found reason to hold that this problem is an exceedingly urgent one for the Church. Every Church understands that the Bible needs to be interpreted, and yet the Protestant Church finds its ultimate court of appeal in the Bible. But what court is to interpret the Bible? Clearly it must be the Church. Then it might seem as if the Roman Catholic Church were not so far wrong after all in setting up the Bible and the Church as its twofold authority. There need be no doubt, however, that Protestantism has shown a sounder instinct than

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

Romanism by declining to put the Church, as an authority for the Christian religion, on equal terms with Holy Scripture. The strength of the Protestant position lies in its twofold belief that the divine revelation given through the Bible is definite and plain and that the Scriptural records are therefore not to be superseded. In judicial questions we do not say that the ultimate authority is the law *and a judge*. The judge has an important part to play, and, assuming that the law on any particular matter is equitable and that the judge gives a decision which is not in accordance with that law, somebody suffers unfairly through the judge's fault. So far as the immediate fortunes of one victim are concerned, the judge is an authority of a higher order than the law. But everybody, especially the victim, knows that all this has been a miscarriage of justice, and that the real authority is not the judge, nor even the law and the judge, but the law alone. The judge is a real partner in authority, only when his decisions are in accordance with law. The same principle holds as between the Bible and the Church. The Bible is the single authority in Christian faith and doctrine, and the Church becomes a partner in that authority by a true interpretation of the Bible. Protestantism holds that the Bible, like the law, has a plain meaning which can be discovered, interpreted, and applied, and that Romanism, chiefly through setting itself on the same level of authority as Scripture, has

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

often proved to be an unjust judge. History has abundantly shown that Protestantism is right.

All the more, however, is Protestantism obliged to say what the Church's functions are as interpreter of Scripture. It is also obliged actually to interpret it. The crux of the whole question of authority lies here: Is the Church in a position to state clearly what are the distinctive and essential affirmations of Christian faith? A negative answer might be grounded either on the Church's ineptitude or on the impossibility of the task. The Church which accepts either of these alternatives demonstrates thereby its own ineptitude. A living Church must answer in the affirmative and keep at its task. It must have a clear declaration of "what the Scriptures principally teach," and it must be prepared at any time to revise its declaration in the light of further knowledge and experience. In the nature of the case the Confession of the Church would not call for frequent or extensive change. With comparatively minor adjustments, the Old Roman Creed which was recited and probably sung by the Church at the middle of the second century might quite well be accepted by Christendom as its rallying symbol to-day. But the great thing is that each Church should have a Confession, and that every member of the Church should be able to feel that in reciting it he is witnessing to the faith which has been passed on from age to age, the norm of faith which the Bible provides.

The Confession should therefore be at one and

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

the same time, subjectively, a confession of the faith of the person confessing, and objectively, a description of the faith in its essence. It is in this latter aspect of it that we are interested at the moment. It is nothing less than the key by which a Church interprets the Bible. It is granted by Protestantism that the Scripture must be interpreted from within itself. The vital importance of this principle must not be missed, since it is the differentia of Protestantism on the objective side, as justification through faith alone is the differentia on the subjective side. The Roman Church feels no need of an interpreting key within Scripture, since the Church itself supplies the whole want in that direction. But the inner key which is a first principle of Protestantism needs to be recognised by a living authority, and that authority can only be the Church. If it were anything more than recognition, if the inner key turned out to be a mere arbitrary selection of those things in Scripture which suited the predilection of the Church, Protestantism would be in no different case from Romanism. In reality, the Bible and the Church conjointly would be the seat of authority for both. But Protestants hold justifiably that the Bible interprets itself, and that what the Church is called to do is to recognise the interpretation. The key is already in the lock, and the Church's task is to see and use it. That is the real secret of the strength of Protestantism.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

The Confession, then, is what the Church recognises as the key by which Scripture interprets itself. Since a Protestant Church does not claim infallibility, it is not permitted to say that its Confession is absolutely and for ever beyond revision. Its recognition of the inner key may not be perfect. Its worth must depend, like everything that is spiritual among men, upon the depth and power of the Church's spiritual penetration, and that penetration depends, in the last resort, upon the extent to which the Church is a true instrument of the Holy Spirit. The claim to infallibility might be a convenient logical refuge, but its only result could be to reduce the Church to spiritual impotence. The Confession could not claim to be perfect. The door must be left open to the possibility of a fuller recognition of the inner key being given to the Church some day. But even a Church cannot do better than its best, and it is not asked to do more than that. It is asked to state in its Confession what the Spirit has led it to recognise as the Bible's declaration of the essentials of the faith. The Confession would, of course, be subordinate to the Bible, in the fundamental sense. The Bible could never be revised from the Confession, but the Confession might have to be revised from a deeper understanding of the Bible. It would be subordinate in the sense in which the judge is subordinate to the law. But as we may have a just judge so we may have a true Confession. By its Confession the Church stands or

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

falls. The Church's answer to the question : What is Christianity ? is answered by its Confession.

Many earnest minds are confused to bewilderment about the Bible and what it principally teaches and what are the essentials of the faith. There is loud call to every Church in Protestantism to make up its mind about these essentials and to state its mind frankly and clearly to the people and on behalf of the people. The time is ripe for making a start in the effort to make the Church's thought and experience explicit. No Church of Jesus Christ is meant to carry on its work in a mood of uncertainty and indecision. Conviction comes as a breeze of the Spirit, and no man can force it ; but many have it already and many more are looking wistfully to those in the Church whose task it is to lead in the expression of that conviction. The present confessions of faith are overloaded. In all our longer creeds there are many things which do not belong to the substance of the faith. We plead for a Confession which shall be, and which everybody will know to be, the Church's mind as to the essentials of the religion of Christ. The Testimony would have its own secure place in the life of the Church, but it is of vital importance to have a Confession by itself which would help Christian folk to that decision of mind which is a prerequisite of victorious life.

(4) It would tend to encourage a better understanding of the " things old and new " which the

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Church is meant to bring forth from its treasury. Men, even Christian men, are prone to take sides where sides were never intended to be taken. Thus, some cling to the notion that the Christian religion is static, fixed, stereotyped. They are so jealous for the finished work of Christ that they come to regard it as finished in a sense which the New Testament repudiates. They are driven to this position by the vehemence of their recoil from the opinions of those who seem to take the atoning work of Christ with too little seriousness. They, on their part, do not take the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth, with sufficient seriousness. There is a type of evangelism which is much concerned for an orthodox view of the Atonement and which yet fails to ring true to the Gospel. The Cross of Christ may easily become an opiate to a man who declines to be urged on by the spirit of that same Cross. Bunyan's insight is as deep as usual when he describes his pilgrim hero as seeing three men lying asleep at the Cross. Hardly another position can be more hopeless than that of the man who sleeps there. Christ is waiting to make all things new—thought, imagination, affection, will, life, society, the whole world—and he who is not a co-worker with Christ in that task of renewal has no right to call himself a believer. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," is a saying which needs to be applied to the present hour.

On the other side are those who are so much

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

concerned to represent Christianity as a religion of progress that they easily slip into a disregard of its historical foundations. In extreme cases there is even a demand that Christianity be shaped anew in every age with lofty indifference to what it may have been in any previous age. This view sometimes styles itself *dynamic*, a word which sounds much better than *static*, but in point of fact the weakness of recoil is as conspicuous in it as in its opposite. The kind of change which is secured by the denial of permanence is at least as illusory as the kind of permanence which is secured by the denial of change. The real dynamic of our religion springs out of that which is static in it. This is not the place to discuss the philosophical antinomy of permanence and change, but it is well to remember that the idea of change passes into zero as soon as the idea of permanence is surrendered. A ceaseless flux of things without a background in the absolute is only a chimera of the human mind. The preservation of the right balance between the permanent and the progressive is of the very essence of Christianity.

The Church which has acquired the habit of distinguishing clearly between its Confession and its Testimony is at least on the way to holding the balance even between the two opposite estimates of Christianity. The true estimate must somehow combine the ideas of permanence and change. The Church's Confession would supply the thought of

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

permanence in the right way, for it would come to be known as the declaration of what has once for all been *given*, by revelation, for all times and climes. Likewise the Church's Testimony would keep suggesting the idea of change, and in the right way too. For it would be looked upon as that Church's contribution, through the gift of the Spirit, to the life of the whole Church. The acceptance of Confession and Testimony would tend to generate a sense of proportion in which futile controversies would have no chance to live.

(5) Lastly, it would serve to promote among the Churches a sense of convergence upon the goal of reunion. From Nicæa onwards all the creeds of Christendom have had a divisive as well as unitive side. The shorter creeds of the still earlier Church were divisive, but in a very different sense. They marked off Christ's folk from the rest of the world. After all there is a controversy which no Christian man can pretend to be above. It is the controversy which God has with sin and unbelief, and every follower of Christ is pledged to be in it. The Cross is an offence to some and foolishness to others, and soldiers of the Cross must fight in scorn of consequence. Nothing can divide men more sharply than the simplest creed of all: Jesus is Lord. But the Nicene Creed began to divide Christians from one another, and its successors have continued the sad process until the present day. In the very effort to unite the Church by an orthodox test it

THE MODERN IDEA OF CREED

began to drive into the life of Christendom a wedge which still remains there. Even at the time of its formulation it pleased nobody except those who got all their own way, and they represented only the Western half of the Church. All the creeds of the œcumenical councils, although designed to produce uniformity of belief, had a powerful disintegrating effect. The Atlantic Ocean, which is from one point of view an effective barrier between two continents, is from another point of view a magnificent highway for commerce and all kinds of friendly intercommunication. It may be that the things which have so long divided the Church are capable of such sublimation under the power of the Spirit that they shall yet become links to bind the sundered parts together.

If the Christian Church of to-day is to follow those things which make for peace it must increase the emphasis upon the standing-ground which is common to all the Churches. These matters are not amenable to arithmetic, but it is not misleading to say that three-fourths of the Christian faith are cherished by the whole of Christendom. It is the remaining fourth that divides. Even if many Churches decline to join the campaign of reunion, no Church is thereby absolved from its plain Christian duty to pray and toil and, if need be, suffer for the grand consummation. It is written that a poor man once saved a city. A Church which is little and despised may yet save Christendom and with

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

it the world. It would be a beginning for the campaign if one Church set itself to find a confession upon which all branches of the Church might reasonably be expected to unite with the whole heart. This ideal is so far already realised, for the Apostles' Creed is recognised in some way by all. But a new symbol, if the right one could only be found, would have many advantages, and this among the rest that new attention would be drawn to the preeminence of the things which unite. As to things which divide, and they are many and great, it is at least possible to propagate the idea that these may be thrown into each Church's Testimony, awaiting the ministry of the healing hands of love and time. The Confession would do much to draw the fragments of the Church together, while the different Testimonies, instead of being impassable gulfs between Christian brethren, would prove to be witnesses to gifts distributed by One Spirit for the good of all or, at the least, conjectures to be tested by the general Christian sense of the Church.

CHAPTER II

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

THE difficulty of securing the universal adoption of one confession as a conscious step towards ultimate reunion is one of atmosphere even more than of contrary opinions. At the present moment the idea of getting anything like the half of Christendom to consider the proposal is in the realm of dreams. Indeed, many lovers of unity cherish no hope of good from a common confession even if that proximate ideal were realised. They are depressed by the ancient œcumenical attempts at unification and the disastrous consequences of those attempts. They are justly suspicious of the method of seeking uniformity through a common formula. They remember the Six Articles of Henry VIII. of England, "for the abolishing of Diversity of Opinions," and either shudder or smile. But there is all the difference in the world between the imposition of a common formula by force or guile and the adoption of a common formula by consent and goodwill. The methods of Nicæa and Chalcedon were execrable, and there is no hope until we are done with them in every shape and colour.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Ecclesiastical manœuvres are not unfamiliar in modern times, but they were the order of the day in the œcumenical councils. There they were reinforced by political machinations and court intrigues. It is impossible to resist the impression that a sore blight fell upon the Church as a result of patronage from the Roman Empire. The edict of Constantine the Great had the effect of adding to the Christian Church the quality of stateliness, but it would have needed more grace than the Church actually possessed to combine that quality with others requisite in a society professing to follow Him who was "meek and lowly in heart." The Church, feeling that its back was no longer to the wall, began almost immediately to play with political power and to use the force of the sword in order to compel its own recalcitrant elements to conform. The effect of this compromise with the world is with us until this hour. Differences of standpoint in Christian doctrine, which could quite well have worked out their own solution in an atmosphere of goodwill under the Spirit's guidance, were intensified and embittered by the forcing tactics of worldiness. Divergence of view throughout Christendom to-day owes all that is tragic in it to the polluted atmosphere in which it has come down to us. It would all be hopeless and desperate but for the passionate faith that love can heal the wounds which hate and folly have made. The recovery of the spirit of love is the paramount need.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The atmosphere of Nicæa and Chalcedon was reproduced, *mutatis mutandis*, at the birth of most of our modern creeds. The gentle Philip Melanchthon, who fortunately had more to do than any other man with fixing the tone and temper of our Protestant symbols, appears among his contemporaries like a violet in the rank grass. He was to Lutheranism what Zwingli was to Calvinism—an influence working for reasonableness and charity, but not strong enough to curb the spirit of those turbulent zealots of doctrine with whom he had to work. Often was he wellnigh heart-broken by the tempers which he encountered among friends and foes. Those tempers can be explained. The Roman Church had brought men under a spiritual tyranny and bolstered up its false practice by false doctrine. Wounds on a battlefield usually get the treatment of a rough surgery. But the bad tempers can never be excused. Still less excuse is there for continuing them now or for not taking serious steps to overcome their baleful effects.

The task which is set for the modern Church, of putting its own house in order, is herculean. We hear more about the task of putting the world in order, but there is no doubt that the two tasks are ultimately one. Herculean the task is, but every Church of goodwill can make a beginning at its own door. There is no bar to prevent any Church from doing its Christian duty if it has the will to do it. It should be a presupposition of all

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

our thought that the Church which is most intent upon doing the Will of Christ is the Church which is thereby doing most for the reunion of Christendom. After all, union, whether incorporating or otherwise, is not the main objective of the Churches. "First, righteousness ; after that, peace." To do the Will of Christ, whatever betide, is everything. The Church which seeks first the Kingdom of God will have the spirit of unity added to it among all other needful things. But if a step can be taken by any Church towards a better understanding between the Churches, it is clearly the Will of Christ that such a step should be taken, and the Church which does not take it must answer for its neglect.

As a practical proposal we suggest that wherever there is already a good understanding between Churches there should be an approach to one another without delay on the subject of a common confession. To take one illustration, the Presbyterian Churches of the world have enough in common to justify an immediate *rapprochement*. No real obstacle hinders the step from being taken at once, and the step is urgent. The relationship of Protestantism to its doctrinal standards is painfully ambiguous, and it is folly to allow that relationship to continue. But Presbyterianism is only one illustration of the opportunity for united action. Wherever Churches feel drawn to one another by the ties of their common faith and love, whatever names they may chance to bear, it is incumbent

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

upon them to come face to face around the subject of a common confession.

Assuming that representatives of a group of Churches assemble for the purpose of finding a Confession to which they themselves could wholeheartedly subscribe and which they might reasonably judge to be capable, in an atmosphere of goodwill, of winning the assent of Christendom, it need not be presumptuous here to discuss the principles which should guide them in their task.

(1) The Confession should contain all the essential elements of the Christian faith. This is the principle of *magnitude*. The difficulty of applying this principle is admitted, and it should be frankly stated that if it is an insurmountable difficulty the idea of a common confession must be abandoned. But we feel bound to assume that courage and charity and humble reliance upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit are able to overcome the obstacle in question. It has been well said that Christianity triumphs by its whole magnitude. It is therefore imperative that nothing that is central be omitted from the Confession. It is not a case of finding out what is common to the beliefs of all who claim to be adherents of the Christian religion. The method of the greatest common measure can only produce a result so attenuated as to be unrecognisable as Christianity. It is a case of Christian knowledge and experience, of a patient and reverent study of the Word of God, of the best estimate that

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

can be made of the Christian testimony of all the ages, and in general of a deep understanding of the Gospel of Christ. When one is engaged upon a scientific problem, the first essential is that he should gather together all the factors which are relevant to the case. If there are ten such factors, his work is practically sure to be rendered futile by the omission of a single one. Nine will not solve nine-tenths of the problem; they will do nothing at all. To introduce irrelevant factors complicates the problem and confuses the mind. To omit relevant factors is far worse. It ensures failure. How does the scientist recognise his relevant factors? That is his secret. He does it by intuition, which is reason and something more, for it is organised common sense. The unity of a thing and the truth of that thing are almost identical. The omission of one vital element of the Christian faith is sufficient to destroy the magnitude of the faith and to make it inoperative. What may seem only a little less may quite well turn out to be a fatal defect. The faith is one, with various nerve-centres, and the absence of a single nerve-centre paralyses the whole. But there is such a thing as spiritual intuition which can detect the nerve-centres of the faith unerringly.

(2) The Confession should contain nothing but what is essential to the Christian faith. This is the principle of *clearness*. To refer to the scientific illustration of the preceding paragraph, the introduction of irrelevant considerations may not be

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

fatal to a solution of the problem but it is nothing but a hindrance and a mistake. Intuition selects the relevant and in so doing rejects the irrelevant. There are good old-fashioned folk who cannot always distinguish between the primary and the secondary in religion, and whose faith has a flavour of superstition about it, and who yet, just because the substance of the faith is all there, are worthier servants of their Lord than others whose faith is clearer but more attenuated. But clearness by no means implies attenuation. We have always, of course, to be on the alert against sacrificing magnitude for clearness. But surely we have now come to the time when we may hope that it does not pass the wit of man to disentangle what is central in Christian truth from what is only on the circumference. In spite of what was said a little ago to the credit of those who cling to the incidental along with the essential, we cannot afford to go on any longer leaving people in doubt as to where the kernel stops and the husk begins.

People who decline Christianity on the ground that it is supposed to require assent to such propositions as that the world was created in six days are not necessarily on a higher intellectual level than those who accept Christianity with such propositions appended to it. But whether declining or accepting, all such people are afflicted with an irrelevance of thought for which the Church is largely responsible. Irrelevant minds are not exceptional, and therefore

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

it is the duty of the Church, a duty which grows more pressing every day, to declare in its Confession what is essential to faith, indicating thereby that what is not declared belongs to some other category than that of things essential. It would be foolish to say or do anything to create the impression that whatever is not in the Confession must be a matter of indifference to faith. Many things affecting the well-being of Churches and persons must be omitted from the Confession; but all that is contended for here is that a clear line can and must be drawn between the foundations of the faith and any structure which may be built thereon.

(3) The Confession should be a declaration of the *data* of Christianity. This is the principle of *objectivity*. It might be held that this is implied in the two principles already laid down. But it is not necessarily implied, and in any case it demands the emphasis of a place by itself. For example, faith is essential to the Christian scheme, but it does not follow that the Confession should contain an article on faith. The whole thing is a confession of faith; and the place of faith, as the believer's attitude, is most impressively defined by the Faith, as that upon which he bestows his belief. Love is also essential to the Christian scheme. According to St. Paul himself, who cannot be suspected of failure to grasp the significance of faith, love is even greater than faith, since it is faith and something more. But it does not follow that the Confession

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

should contain an article on love or on any of the Christian graces. Faith and love are not only essential in Christianity; through the preeminent character given to them they are even distinctive of Christianity. And yet we hold strongly that, so far as the Confession is concerned, they should remain implicit in the acknowledged acceptance of the great objective facts. Here, at all events, the instinct of the early Church was true. The Apostles' Creed and the earliest extant Christian hymns reveal an objectivity which the modern Church would do well to recover.

It belongs to the objectivity of the Confession that the historical foundation-facts of Christianity should have full weight given to them in it. The demand that Christianity should continuously be thought out afresh is reasonable and right, but not so the demand that it should be subject to continual alteration under the influence of the time-spirit. The various heresies which the Church has from time to time rejected may be construed as well-meant efforts to bring the *data* of Christianity into line with the forms of thought which chanced then to be in vogue. The mind loves a synthesis, and the heresies were for the most part syntheses in which it was sought to fit Christianity into the intellectual frameworks which governed men's thoughts in different ages. Whatever fault we may find with the Church for its treatment of heresies and heretics, there is nothing which bears clearer

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

testimony to the divine guidance granted to it than its rejection of all these premature syntheses. The Church had the sure instinct that in the explanations which they provided something which was vital was being explained away. It was firmly resolved that the revealed contents of the faith should remain unexplained rather than that they should be explained out of existence. And the Church of to-day must manifest the same resolution.

It is one of the most interesting things about the creeds of the œcumenical councils that some of their words and phrases were intentionally vague. The intention did not spring out of any affection for vagueness, but from the intuition that vagueness left the door open and courted further inquiry. Mystery was retained, not from love of mystery, but from the feeling that this was a way of enshrining vital truth to which no thought-forms yet evolved were capable of giving adequate expression. It was like the strain and conflict and aspiration of Gothic architecture over against the Greek idea of ease and symmetry and clear definition. The Church was acting not only in the interests of the substance of the faith in repelling the heresies, although that was its only conscious motive. It was acting in the interests of the highest reason. For thought-forms themselves are subject to development and have always been so. We can see the limitations of those of former ages, but it is never so easy to detect the weaknesses of those of one's own age.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We are all so apt to be creatures of our time. It is one of the "Idols of the Mind" to assume that the categories which govern the thought of our own age are the final criterion of truth.

It is not a relevant objection that "man is the measure of all things" and that we have nothing but our own minds with which to judge truth. It is true that we cannot hold a faith which contradicts our intelligence, but we can hold a faith which we are not yet able wholly to explain. There are many facts in the universe which await a rational explanation, but it is not a reasonable procedure to deny or explain away these facts on that account. No human being has as yet explained gravitation. It is still a mystery. But we do not say that it contradicts our intelligence. It simply challenges our intelligence, and we believe in it and work away for the required explanation. This is not a surrender of reason but a self-criticism of reason by its own deeper part. The Church has not lost its instinct for those historical facts which are the foundation of the Christian faith. Had she lost it she would have ceased to be the Church. A Confession for Christendom must give full play to this instinct and resist any tendency that would weaken the force or obscure the light of the things which have been revealed.

(4) The Confession should have due regard to the history of the Church's creeds. This is the principle of *continuity*. The idea that we must

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

begin all over again is as much a denial of the Holy Spirit as the idea that progress is impossible. However we may deplore the Church's divisions and the tempers which have too often marred its determinations, it is faithless to deny that the candlestick has been crowned with the star. Regard must be paid in the Confession both to the substance and the form of the historical creeds. The ancient creeds especially, which have stood against wind and weather through so many centuries and which still survive in the reverence and affection of the Church's faith, must be taken fully into the reckoning in any Confession which can have a real claim upon the suffrage of Christendom. Their very survival in the Church is a real testimony to their intrinsic worth. In the task of determining what are the essential elements of the Christian faith we dare not ignore the testimony of the Church in any age. The guidance of the Holy Spirit in this task must be looked for by taking into account not only the teaching of Scripture but also the testimony of the Church up to the present hour. So far as form is concerned, we take it for granted that the Confession ought to conform to the earliest creeds, not only because that form is the earliest but because it is manifestly the best. It is scriptural, brief, spontaneous, direct, vital, and a universal Confession must be all that.

To speak more particularly, the Old Roman Creed, from which the Apostles' Creed was gradually

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

evolved, may be taken as setting the type for the creeds of Christendom. There is no need to enter into the controversy, which is not yet finally settled, as to whether there was an early Eastern creed which was independent of the early Roman Creed. The issue here involved is not affected by that controversy. We may take it as proved that just as the Apostles' Creed, which does not seem to have reached its present form before the year 700, was the result of a gradual development from the Old Roman Creed, dating from about the year 150, so the Old Roman Creed was itself the result of a gradual development through still older and simpler forms. The rudimentary New Testament Creed:

I believe in Jesus Christ as Lord,

passed, before the close of New Testament times, into the Trinitarian form:

I believe in God the Father,

And in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

And in the Holy Spirit.

The stages of the process by which these three Articles were so expanded as to form the Old Roman Creed have not been and may never be traced. We can at the best only guess the source and motive of each expansion.

Had the development been definite, and had each expansion been accepted and declared as authoritative by the Church, we should possibly now be

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

able to fasten upon one point of the development and discern there the Confession which we desiderate for Christendom. But that does not represent the historical situation. It is probable that each Christian community developed a creed of its own, and that the Roman community, true to the orderly and syncretistic instinct of Rome, made selections from various local creeds, put its own stamp of unity upon them, and gave the authority of its prestige to what is now known as the Old Roman Creed.

From one point of view the modern Church's task in framing a Confession takes the complexion of reconstructing an ideal stage in the gradual formation of the Apostles' Creed, in full view of the apostolic tradition and the testimony of the Church. What is wanted is the full nucleus of the Apostles' Creed. Historically it was that nucleus which triumphed at Nicæa and Chalcedon. Although it was the Eastern and not the Western theologians who proposed the groundwork for the Nicene Creed, the creed as it turned out was fashioned in all essentials upon the Roman model. It is the same nucleus that reappears in Protestant theology, John Calvin bearing witness in his *Institutes*. The creeds of the Protestant Churches are founded on the Apostles' Creed. It is not necessary to go further in order to show that the full nucleus of the Apostles' Creed, if that could be ascertained, would give us a sure foothold on the rock of history.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Church has already, with some indistinctness, founded on that nucleus, and what is wanted is that its real position be clarified and made more secure.

Some will contend that we should have more to say for ourselves at the bar of history were we to take our stand boldly on the Apostles' Creed and seek to make it the universal Confession of Christendom. But apart from the fact that we need to take the whole of the history into account, including the New Testament, it cannot be maintained that the Apostles' Creed wholly satisfies the second guiding principle which we have laid down for the formation of a Confession. Some expressions have entered into it which cannot be justified, either from the New Testament or from Christian experience, as belonging to the substance of the faith. Take the *Virgin Birth*, which has already been referred to. The question is not as to the historicity of the event but as to whether it should find a place in a Confession dealing only with matters vital to the faith. The Virgin Birth is mentioned in only two out of the four Gospels. It is never referred to in our Lord's own teaching. St. Paul never refers to it explicitly in any of his letters or recorded utterances, and the New Testament never once suggests that it is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. If it be contended that it is an implication of faith, it is sufficient to reply that the Confession we aim at securing is not the place for

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

implications. If it were, why not introduce also the doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus which was much more in evidence than the Virgin Birth in apostolic teaching? The objection to the Virgin Birth having a place in the Confession is not based upon any difficulty there may be in accepting it as a fact, for if we decline the miracle there we must introduce as great a miracle elsewhere, but upon the obvious fact that the Apostles did not make it central in the Gospel. Or take the *Descent into Hades*. It has already been admitted that this clause was introduced to serve a real religious interest. But the objection to it lies in its ambiguity. It was introduced late into the Apostles' Creed, and the religious interest of it is much better served by the simple statement that Jesus died and was buried. Any further meaning which may be read into the clause, whatever we may say of it, certainly does not belong to the ideal nucleus which we require.

After all, why should we shrink from revising the credal forms set up by men of the sixth or fourth or even of the second century? Much as we reverence the Christian documents of the second century, we are bound to feel that they belong to a time when the high-tide of New Testament inspiration has passed. We should not hesitate to hold that the Apostles' Creed is not apostolic enough in its emphasis, and that the time has come when the task should be undertaken of making it truer to its

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

name. Justice to history is not compatible with bondage to history. Our Confession must have due regard to the history of creeds, but it must be the outcome of the spirit of freedom.

(5) The Confession should register recent gains in the Church's understanding of the Gospel. This is the principle of *prophecy*. The Church is in duty bound to perform its prophetic function of declaring the word spoken to it by the living Spirit of God. It must bring out of its treasury things new as well as things old. It would be a poor commentary upon the vitality of the modern Church, and a virtual denial of the present activity of the Holy Spirit within the Church, were we constrained to admit that in recent generations and even in recent centuries the Church has drawn nothing new from the unsearchable riches of Christ. If we know nothing more than they did in the second or the seventeenth century, there is no call for a new Confession. But if the Church has been alive during the past three centuries, a revised Confession is an imperious necessity. A new Confession is called for by the better understanding of the Bible. It is not an extravagant claim that the Church is in a more favourable position to-day to interpret Holy Scripture and to apportion it its true place in the Christian religion than at any previous time. In New Testament times, of course, the New Testament as a book did not exist. Since the writings forming the New Testament were

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

put together in the Canon, no period has been marked by so rich and profound an appreciation of the Bible as the period stretching between the Protestant Reformation and the present day.

The Protestant Reformation was itself a spiritual awakening which was directly inspired by the re-discovery of a scriptural truth which had got itself buried in the dross of centuries. It was a rediscovery of the terms on which the salvation offered by the Gospel is communicated to men. The recovered understanding as to the freeness and spirituality of divine grace and the uniqueness of faith in the Christian scheme found its way, as was fitting, into the new symbols which emerged from the new life of that time. But it was inevitable that the emphasis placed upon the newly recovered doctrine should tend to obscure other truths of a complementary kind. More recent times have done much to restore the balance. It is sufficient to mention the close and reverent attention given in our own day to the study of the historical Jesus. It is no exaggeration to say that the incomparable story unfolded by the Gospels has a deeper place in the heart of the Church to-day than it ever had before. They who have told us the story must indeed have "beheld His glory," else could they never have enabled us as they have done to behold it too. And if the fascination of the Jesus of history seems in some quarters to occupy the whole place of the appeal which comes from the

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Crucified and Risen Lord, this is not the deepest result that has followed the rediscovery of the glory which streams from the earthly life of Jesus. The human mind has a pendulum-like quality. It is like the compass-needle oscillating about the north, but tending, we are permitted to hope, to settle towards its star. The recent emphasis upon the Jesus of history was all required to give the right quality to the faith which was the rediscovery of earlier modern times. The two discoveries are one. "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me" is said with finest meaning by him who can also say that he has seen "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

We have probably said enough to make good the contention that the modern Church has something of its own to contribute in the formulation of a new Confession. Even if it be no more than a clearer understanding of Scripture, the case is proved. The guiding principle which is being here laid down for the framing of a Confession is that full justice should be done to the new as well as to the old. The decision as to what the contents of the Confession should be is in the last resort a matter of Biblical interpretation; and if the modern Church has made no advance there, it has done nothing at all for the growth of Christian knowledge. But we confidently believe that the Holy Spirit has been working, guiding His Church into new realms of

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

the truth, and calling it to make these realms accessible to all men.

Turning now to the Testimony of a Church as distinguished from its Confession, it is not necessary to spend much time over the principles which should be observed in its formation. Those which have been laid down for the Confession apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to a Testimony. The modification of those guiding principles is due to the difference of conception and purpose as between Confession and Testimony. Broadly speaking, a Church should regard its Testimony as the expansion of its Confession in terms of the Christian experience which it has gained along the particular historical line by which it has come. That being so, a Testimony should conform to the Confession in the matter of order.

An important and difficult question is thus raised at the outset. Should not an attempt be made to expound the doctrine of the Trinity? If an exposition of this doctrine is attempted, a departure is made from the order of the Apostles' Creed, which has three principal Articles, the first on the Father, the second on the Son, the third on the Holy Spirit, everything else being brought under one or other of these three heads. It would be absurd to be dogmatic on this point, but we venture to think that no exposition of the Trinity should be attempted, even in a Testimony. It should be left to theological text-books. The attitude of the Apostles' Creed to the Trinity is the New Testa-

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ment attitude, and it is more edifying to the average intelligent Christian mind than any alleged exposition can be. For it simply affirms the Trinity of Christian experience, and that is all the length that any mortal man can go. Surely it cannot be maintained that it is given to any man, or even to the whole Church, to comprehend the meaning of the essential Trinity. Remarks on the metaphysical relation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit look too much like the profession of transcendent knowledge at the very point where it holds absolutely that we cannot by searching find out God. If such remarks were an aid of any kind to the believer's faith or knowledge, or if they were the best means of serving the religious interest which they are meant to secure, we should have no fault to find with them. But we make bold to say that they mean little or nothing to people who are not accustomed to think, while in the minds of people who do think they stir up more difficulties than they put to rest. A considerable experience of the thoughts of Christian people who are not trained theologically has convinced one that the best of those people prefer not to pry into the secrets of the Godhead. Their instinct is certainly right. It is not the mark of a well-balanced mind, but rather of the reverse, to have a theory of the essential Trinity. The theories which one has had to listen to seldom bear any relation to the Trinity of the metaphysical creeds, and are altogether of such a kind as to leave

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

one wishing that the people who expound them might turn their attention to matters more within the range of human capacity.

What has been said of the doctrine of the Trinity applies in principle to such other doctrines as that of election. The principle is that a Testimony should not go beyond what is written on such a difficult question. We need not repeat what has been said upon this subject in an earlier chapter, but it is well to bear in mind that the way of truth often lies along the edge of a precipice, and that rashness then becomes particularly foolish and perilous. It is better to let the doctrine of election minister its evangelical comfort to those who are in Christ and then to leave it there. Logical deductions, even when they seem to have colour lent them by particular passages of Scripture, are very dangerous at this point. The guiding principle is the preservation of the scriptural balance upon the subject. Why should any Church desire to convey an impression about election, or about anything else, which is contrary to, or in any way different from, the impression left by the New Testament? Proportion is said to be the secret of beauty. There is just as little doubt that it is the secret of truth. With regard to all those doctrines which tempt the dogmatic mind forth into the region of speculation, the rule for a Church Testimony is to reproduce the proportion of the faith which is given in the New Testament. If this rule is not observed, a

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

yoke is laid upon the necks of disciples which the Gospel never meant them to bear, for it is not the yoke of Christ. "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," said the Master, and the New Testament is true to that description from first to last.

What advantage then has a Testimony over the Confession? Much every way. It is not denied that the doctrine of election should find a place in the Testimony of a Church. Calvinism has made men and nations, and the fault which we have to find with the extreme, hyper-logical forms of Calvinism is not only that they have overstated the truth, but that in so doing they have helped to drive mankind to the opposite extreme. The good of Calvinism has been thrown away along with the bad. In spite of what has been said against unjustifiable forms of the doctrine of election, it may be confidently affirmed that the world needs nothing so much to-day as a return to the strength of Calvinism. But the strength of Calvinism is all in the New Testament. The controversy of Calvinism with Arminianism is but one illustration of the way in which "the whole counsel of God" tends to get broken into fragments when the unity of the Spirit is lost. Calvinism stands for the Majesty of God. It sets men in an attitude of reverence and awe. It inspires hymns like: *When I survey the wondrous Cross*, in which every adjective breathes a wondering adoration, even the love of Christ being "so amazing." Arminianism stands

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

for the intimacy of God with the believing soul. It encourages the emotion of affection on the part of the worshipper. It inspires hymns like : *Jesus, Lover of my soul*, which a strict Calvinist would have pronounced to be a transgression of the law of reverence. But we sing both hymns, for we feel that both echo authentic notes of the Gospel. In point of fact, the New Testament thought of God and Christ combines majesty and intimacy in an undivided unity. It is like the sunlight which can be broken up into the seven colours of the solar spectrum, but which, unbroken, is more than all. It is now time for Calvinism and Arminianism to meet and join in one, and that is the task for a Testimony in its doctrine of election.

The contents of a Testimony and their manner of treatment would vary with different Churches, and this fact makes it inopportune to enter into detail. But the Testimony of a Protestant Church could not well omit a clear exposition of two doctrines, that of Saving Faith and that of Scripture. The maintenance of the gains of the Protestant Reformation demands that both of these doctrines should have emphasis in a Protestant Testimony. Besides, it is along the line laid down by them that the Churches of the Reformation have made their chief advance in Christian knowledge. How much that advance stands in need of consolidation and declaration has already been indicated. There is a loud call to the Church to set about the task

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

without delay. It might take long to accomplish the task and it might not. The time at least is ripe for the confronting of the task. As to the order of these two doctrines in a Testimony, each of them should form a sub-Article under the Article on the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to evoke faith. The Bible is preeminently the Book of the Spirit, for to Him it owes its vital power and by Him its truths are made vital to men. The Holy Spirit, the Church, the Bible, faith, man's appropriation of the Redemption wrought by Christ,—that seems the fitting order for the presentation of these great themes in a Testimony.

CHAPTER III

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

THE views advanced in the preceding chapters must be delivered from the realm of pure theory by an actual proposal for a Confession. What strikes one about the great mass of modern utterances upon the subject of creed is their absolute pointlessness. If the Church's lethargy or its timidity in relation to creed revision provokes impatience, most of the floating criticisms of creed provoke a feeling more akin to contempt. It has been fashionable for a while to rail at creeds. This fact should make all good men cautious in their words. It may be merry to float down with the tide, but there is no use pretending that it is heroic. Had Tennyson foreseen the empty chorus of approval which was to greet his couplet :

“ There is more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds,”

he would probably never have written it. When people quote these lines as if they stood for an arithmetical fact, they should at least be reminded that a comparison of honest doubt with a dishonest creed is not illuminating. We know that honesty

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

is always better than dishonesty, but we also know that faith is always better than doubt.

Most of the modern strictures on creed decline to condescend to the concrete and practical. They deal in shibboleths, pour endless vials of contempt on "outworn creeds," leave the general impression that creeds are shams from first to last, and betray no consciousness of the consideration that an outworn soul is at least as possible as an outworn creed, and a greater tragedy. It is nearly always impossible to say whether the outworn creeds referred to are such doctrines as that the world was made in six days, and that the sun actually stood still in obedience to Joshua's behest, and that a great fish literally swallowed Jonah, or such a doctrine as that Jesus rose from the dead in the sense meant by the New Testament. It is futile to talk at large about creeds. If a man believes something, let him tell us what he believes and why he believes it. If he believes nothing, let him say so, or, better still, be silent.

The following form of Confession is suggested as agreeable to the principles already laid down.

SUGGESTED FORM OF CONFSSION

1. I believe in GOD THE FATHER Almighty ;
Maker of heaven and earth.
2. And in JESUS CHRIST, His only Son, our Lord ;
Who came down and was incarnate and was
made man ;

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

He died for us men and for our salvation,
being crucified under Pontius Pilate,
dead, and buried ;

The third day He rose from the dead ;

He ascended into heaven ;

He sitteth on the right hand of the Father ;

Thence He shall come to judge the living
and the dead.

3. And in the HOLY SPIRIT ;

The Holy Church ;

The forgiveness of sins ;

The resurrection of the body. Amen.

It will be seen that this form of Confession is based upon the Old Roman Creed. The omission of the clause on the Miraculous Conception and the substitution of *body* for *flesh* are made on grounds which have been sufficiently explained. The additions have in view a recovery of the full apostolic emphasis, the testimony of Scripture being interpreted in the light of the Church's experience all down the ages, in so far as that experience attests itself as the work of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are both drawn upon where they are felt to have made a real contribution to the original form. In short, an attempt has been made to apply all the principles already discussed for the making of a Confession.

A brief exposition of this Confession is perhaps the best way of testing whether it contains all the

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

fundamental notes of the apostolic Gospel and nothing but those notes.

ARTICLE I

There will be little disposition to question the wisdom of adopting this Article from the Apostles' Creed, and giving it the first place as that creed does. Some modern symbols start with an Article on Scripture or on Christ; but while a case can be made out for such procedure, the case against it is stronger. Protestantism is right in assigning a unique place to Scripture in the seat of authority for the Christian religion, but it is not a corollary of that position to hold that we believe in God the Father because we first believe in the Bible. Even where faith in God has been directly prompted by the Bible, or rather by the Spirit speaking through the Bible, the Bible is only believed because its teaching about God has found a man's soul. The sounder proposition is that we believe in the Bible because we believe in God. Reverence for the Bible may bring it about that a man believes in God because the Bible inculcates that belief, but that can be nothing more than a beginning for faith. Faith in God does not become a profound personal experience until it rests on spiritual foundations. A man must be able to say: "Now I believe, not simply because the Bible has borne its testimony, but because I know for myself." In any case, belief in the Bible is on an entirely different plane from

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

belief in God. It is unfortunate that the same formula *believe in* should be used in our language for both kinds of belief. We do not worship the Bible ; we worship God. And the Confession which begins with an Article on the Bible is apt, to say the least of it, to convey a false impression.

More can be said on behalf of beginning with an Article on Christ, as the Heidelberg Catechism does. We believe in God the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord, and it would seem to be the more logical procedure to begin with Him to whom our knowledge of the Father is due. But there are matters in which both logical and chronological considerations must yield to other considerations which are higher than either, and this is unquestionably one. We ought to begin, not with what is first in the order of knowledge, but with what is first in the order of fact. "All things are of God." That is the consistent and emphatic teaching of our Lord Himself and of His Apostles and of the whole Bible. Whatever questions may arise about the Divine Trinity, upon this fact the mind must ultimately rest, if it is to find rest at all, that God is the source and goal of existence. "Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory for ever and ever."

The Christian faith needs to be stated in separate propositions to suit our limited intelligence, but it is worth while to dwell for a moment on the fact that the faith is one thing. One who, like St. Paul,

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

lived and moved and had his being among the transcendent thoughts which gather round the Gospel seemed to see and feel the faith as one undivided and indivisible whole. The first fourteen verses of the Epistle to the Ephesians have already been referred to in another connection, but the most impressive thing about them is the torrential rush of the Apostle's thought. He feels he must declare the whole truth of God in one breath ; and ordinary readers of those verses, if they have really followed the thought, must have had a sense of breathlessness long before they have reached the fourteenth verse. Those verses make one feel how good it would be to see the unity of Christian truth like that. We have frequently had to say, but it is worth saying again, that the unity and the truth of the Gospel are one. In the region of the Gospel, St. Paul thoroughly understood the modern doctrine of relativity. It seems as if he understood it all round.

The application of what has been said about the unity of the faith to our first Article is that here the whole Gospel is implicit. It must be interpreted by everything that follows, and it interprets everything that follows. *The Father* is the correlate of *His only Son* in the second Article. Our thought of God the Father implies our thought of Jesus and of all that He was and did and is. We cannot avoid that anticipation of thought. We ought to have no desire to avoid it. It is due on the one

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

hand to the unity of the faith itself, and on the other to the dynamic, leaping character of the believer's thought in touch with the organic unity of its object. The whole Confession is in every affirmation which it contains, and every affirmation is in every part of the Confession. If this could be completely made out, it would be one of the best possible endorsements of the soundness of the Confession.

It is a daring thing to say : *I believe in God the Father Almighty*. It commits us to the greatest of all the affirmations that the mind can make, and it commits us to a life which proceeds upon the truth of that affirmation. It means that for us reason is at the heart of things. There are many things which appear unreasonable, most so where reason might be expected to hold undisputed sway ; but, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, we cling to the faith that reason reigns supreme. It means that for us righteousness is at the heart of things. In a world where righteousness is so often on the scaffold and iniquity on the throne, where John the Baptist is shut up in Machaerus and Herod Antipas roams the world at large, in a world which crucified the Son of God, it is no light thing to believe that righteousness really reigns. But in our first Article we pledge ourselves to that belief. It means for us, still more, that love is at the heart of things. In face of nature's seeming indifference to human interests, in face of man's inhumanity to man, in face of all the pain and sorrow, in face

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

of sin and death, we dare to believe that God is Love. It is more than daring ; it would be absurd and impossible did not Love Himself stoop down to us and work in us a miracle of understanding. It is only by a miracle of grace that we can feel love to be in the nature of things. And the heart of the miracle appears where the world showed at its worst. For in the Cross of Christ, where unreason and sin and hate most abounded, there did grace much more abound, and victory remained with Love. We cannot confess our first Article except our hearts are overcome by the passion of the Cross. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also *with Him* freely give us all things ? "

It has been said that *Maker of heaven and earth*, which was added by the Apostles' Creed to the Old Roman Creed, really adds nothing to the doctrinal sense. Strictly speaking, that is quite true. And yet we feel that the words justify their place in the Confession, not only because the Apostles' Creed has twined the reverence of centuries about them, but even more because they echo a truth which is characteristic of the scriptural thought of God. It is significant that our Lord, in speaking of the Father, frequently had "heaven and earth" in His mind. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Our Lord did not use words or phrases without edge and point. It meant that

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

heaven and earth, however men might separate them or suppose them to be separated, were ultimately under the one governance. The Will of God was perfectly done in heaven and had a right to be done on earth as well. He who created heaven created the earth also. It was the fulfilment of a favourite prophetic thought about God. He not only ruled the nations and shaped the destinies of men. "He made the stars also." "Two things," said Kant, "fill me with wonder and admiration; the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." The prophets of Israel had given previous expression to that same wonder. The God of righteousness was also the God of the stars. Earth and heaven, natural and spiritual, are one universe.

ARTICLE II

The principal clause of the second Article is parallel with the first Article. That parallelism was clearly meant from earliest times to express strongly the place given to Christ by Christian faith. To mention faith in Christ in the same terms as faith in God was felt to be something which the Christian was entitled and bound to do, and it may still be claimed that there is no more impressive way of stating that Jesus belongs to that side of reality which we call God. It is only by analogy or figure of speech that we can think or speak of the relation between God and Christ. In speaking of Himself to

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

men, our Lord seems to have used most frequently the designation *the Son of Man*, a conception which is correlate to *the Kingdom of God*. When His relation to His Father had to be expressed, it cannot be doubted that He most frequently used the simple name *the Son*. He used the words *Father* and *Son* analogically, and we may take it that they are the best human analogy of the transcendent relationship. It is often felt that the uniqueness of our Lord's relation to God demands that the words be taken literally, their analogical character being confined to the relation between God as our Father and ourselves as His children. But the absolutely literal interpretation of Father and Son can only be sustained if we agree that the human relation of father and son is only a promise and intimation of what that relation is in the depths of reality. That way of thinking has its soundness and use. It belongs to the general interpretation of human personality as rudimentary, the full-orbed expression of personality being the Divine. But since Jesus spoke to make plain people understand, we may be quite sure that this way of thinking was not in His first intention. His hearers had their definite idea of the relation between father and son, and our Lord started from that idea of theirs and no other, making it serve as the richest analogy that could be found to express what He was to God and God was to Him. That He employs the same analogy for the relation between God and His erring children

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

does not affect the solitariness of His relation to God. This is sufficiently proved by the fact that in speaking of our relation to God, He never includes Himself in that relation. It is always *My Father* and *your Father*.

It is with deliberation and conviction that we have omitted the Nicene test-word *of the same substance* (Gr., homoousion; Lat., consubstantialium) from the Confession. The religious interest which it was meant to serve was a vital one, but it is open to question whether it has ever served that interest well. In any case, one is justified in holding emphatically that the word has outlived its usefulness in the doctrine of the Person of Christ. It is not scriptural; it has the form without the power of an explanation; and it is bad philosophy. It is enough to ask those who love the word *substance* what they mean by it in this connection. Probably no two hold it in exactly the same sense. We speak of "the substance of the faith," by which we mean the central elements of the faith, the word as there used being highly figurative. The figurative use is certainly the most defensible of all, and probably most people make that use of it in holding to the Nicene Creed. But this was not the sense in which the word was used historically. It is not the approved sense of the word. Substance is the Aristotelian counterpart of attribute. The attributes of anything are all that we know of that thing. They may give little or no key to what the

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

thing itself is. The attributes cannot be regarded as being in the realm of reality at all. The substance of the thing is the real thing, lying in behind, unknown and unknowable, but a necessary postulate of the possibility of phenomena. This is a rough-and-ready sketch of Aristotle's scheme of thought, but it is sufficiently accurate for our purpose.

This Aristotelian scheme has dominated both philosophical and scientific thought, with little interruption, down to the present day. It has been a gigantic tyranny of the mind. By far the most important and successful insurrection against it was inaugurated by Lord Bacon, who pled for the adoption of the inductive method of thinking instead of the deductive method of Aristotle, sending men to nature in order to "let her speak for herself," and thus unleashing science and sending it upon its conquering career. But the liberation was by no means thorough-going. It was in the region of logic but not in that of metaphysics. The old figment of substance and attribute has persisted in philosophy and has shadowed science as well, reappearing in the modern scientific distinction between matter and properties of matter. We are not so foolish as to suggest that the distinction has been of no service to thought and progress, or that it is essentially false. Our point is that the Aristotelian interpretation of the distinction is radically false, and that it has been nothing short of an incubus upon man's thoughts about

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

ultimate things. It has given rise to what Dr. Whitehead has well called "the facile vice of bifurcation," by which our thought of reality habitually breaks up into two parts, one being a guess and the other a dream. We can only make *guesses* about reality, without ever grasping it, through our knowledge of attributes or properties, and we can only *dream* about reality by mentioning the mysterious word *substance*.

The science of to-day is dealing with the last vestige of its bondage to Aristotelian thinking, but theology is either more blind or more timid than science in general. And yet we have long had the Bible in our hands, the very Book from which Bacon drew the inspiration which liberated science. The Bible stands for this truth above all others, that God has spoken for Himself in history, and it is for us to mark the clear accents of His voice. He speaks for Himself still, for He is always the Living God. Theology ought to have been less in bondage to "substance and attribute" than any other department of knowledge, but it has never altogether dared to be free. The Nicene theology has helped much to keep Aristotle in the Church's saddle, and therefore we plead for the dismissal of the sinister word *substance* from any Confession which claims the suffrages of Christendom.

The divinity and the humanity of our Lord are both secured adequately and scripturally by the principal clause of our second Article. The name

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

Jesus lifts the thoughts of the believer to the transcendent realm, but it keeps them at the same time rooted in history. The strongest oak is that which has the strongest hold upon the soil. Besides, the safeguards against any form of the Sabellian heresy are ample, and any specific safeguards in this direction would admit the air of theological controversy without the addition of anything effective. It is made quite plain that faith in God and faith in Christ are not attitudes to be marked off from each other as if God and Christ were two Gods. The believer's faith is one to the full extent in which God and Christ are One; and whatever distinction we may or must introduce there, we know that the depth of that unity is such that we cannot fathom it. The old Western theology was right in insisting upon the necessity of holding both to the unity and to the distinction. We may learn much about both and even reach an intuition as to how the two terms are to be equated, but how to reduce the intuition to a formula will probably always pass the wit of man.

The first expansion of the second Article, "who came down and was incarnate and was made man," is from the Nicene Creed, emphasises both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, and conveys the New Testament impression of the manifestation of the Son of God. "Came down" is a general expression, as no doubt it was meant at the first to be, of the coming into human life of One who

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

really belonged elsewhere. It suggests all the distinctive features of that incomparable life. It was the fundamental characteristic of that life that it represented heaven on earth. Jesus always spoke and bore Himself as One who came from another world. The crowds who hung upon His lips recognised it. They said: "What is this? A new teaching! He speaks with authority." The Twelve recognised it more deeply, as was natural, and they said: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" Our Lord's assumptions reveal the home of His soul even more impressively than His direct statements. It confirms the conviction that in these Gospels we have real life-portraits of Jesus. "If it were not so I would have told you." Think of what is taken for granted in that word. Or this: "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." When we think of heaven we do so in terms of earth. It is the best that we can do. But He thought of earth in terms of heaven. It is the reversal of the ordinary human orientation. As He marked the course of this world, intuitively He measured it by the standard which was firmly set within His soul by His own native air, the air of heaven.

Coming down among men from another world, He brought us good news. He came preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven. He told us that heaven is very near, and that it is very good. It is at heart a friendly world if men will

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

consent to try it and see. It is the realm in which His Father's Will is perfectly fulfilled, and anyone may enter it who, with humble and trustful heart, is prepared to make God's Will his own. Heaven, which is the native home of Jesus, is our true home as well, if we only knew it, and it is open to all who are content to be as little children. No wonder the most wistful and wondering souls of all the ages ever since have gathered round Jesus even as exiles gather round one who brings them good news from home.

The second expansion, "He died for us men and for our salvation, being crucified under Pontius Pilate, dead, and buried," owes the words "crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried," to the Old Roman Creed. The feeling has been expressed in some quarters that the reference to the Roman procurator might conveniently be omitted from the Confession. But surely that feeling is due to a lack of appreciation of the interests involved. The early Church was guided by a sure instinct in magnifying what some moderns count as a detail. The proportion given by all the four evangelists to the circumstances attending the death of Jesus is highly significant. The motive of the emphasis seems to have been threefold: (1) the central place which the death of Jesus occupies in the Christian faith; (2) the determination that the historical character of the event shall never be forgotten; (3) the importance of the fact that

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

Jesus was put to death by the constituted authorities, Roman and Jewish, with the approval of the popular voice. "Crucified under Pontius Pilate" seems to express the evangelical tradition better than any other short form of words could do. They at once suggest human wickedness on a wide, premeditated, and historical scale. They make it plain that Jesus was treated as a malefactor, that it was no case of highway or private murder, that it was done in the name of law, and that the Roman procurator did not bear the responsibility alone for the deed. Some people seem to think that the evil part played by the human race in the death of Jesus makes no doctrinal difference. They imagine that it would amount to the same thing if He had died a natural death. We feel sure they are wrong there. They are certainly not in line with the whole thought of the New Testament on the subject.

When the Apostles taught that Jesus died for us, they always set that proclamation upon the dark, historical background that Jesus was put to death by wicked men, men who represented and gathered up the evil tendencies in human nature and society. The fact that God gave up His Son for us and that Jesus gave Himself up for us did not affect the responsibility of the race for the foulest and most representative deed of its history. The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel has an attitude of sorrowful wonder at this, that "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The earliest Chris-

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

tians knew all too well about the circumstances in which Jesus was put to death. Their temptation was to regard it as nothing but a black, human tragedy, a bewildering miscarriage, a complete destruction of their hopes. "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel." It was the Gospel to them to learn that God was in this thing after all, supremely in it. God gave up His Son, and the Son gave up Himself, for men. But those early Christians were in no danger of forgetting the pit from which they had been rescued. Man's guilty part in the Cross could never slip out of their memories and consciences. It is otherwise with us. We have not passed through the agony of not knowing that God was behind the Cross, and man's share in the deed may fail to touch the conscience and may even appear like some insignificant detail. It is well that we have these sombre particulars in the Gospels. We have need to ponder them until they wound and kill our pride. The Gospel will not stand out in relief for us till we can see it in its dark setting, and the dark setting must have its place in our Confession.

The word "dead," from the Apostles' Creed, has been added for reasons which should be obvious. A much more important change, however, has been made in this expansion, and this calls for defence. The familiar phrase "for us men and for our salvation" is drawn from the Nicene Creed, but it

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

has been transferred from the Incarnation, with which it is associated in that creed, to the death of Jesus. Even if the phrase is meant in the Nicene Creed, as it likely is, to cover the death as well as the Incarnation, we still feel that the change registered in our Confession is justified. We admit, further, that one line at least of apostolic thought regards the Incarnation as reaching its completion only with the Cross, for we interpret the saying: "This is He who came by water and blood" (1 John v. 6) as meaning that the Son of God had not fully *come* until He had poured out His blood upon the Cross. But even so, we feel strongly that the phrase "for us" should be reserved in the Confession for the death of our Lord. We could easily be led at this point into a discussion on the doctrine of the Atonement, but it would be irrelevant. The New Testament affords clear guidance on this question. It does not say that Christ *lived and died* for us; it says that He *died* for us. Of course there is a sense in which we can say that He lived for us, but there is also such a thing as a sense of proportion. When we say that He lived and died for us, the natural inference from our words is that His death was for us in exactly the same sense as His life. But that is quite clearly not the doctrine of the New Testament. His death was preeminently for us; and if we spread the thought implied in the phrase "for us" over His life we change the whole emphasis of the

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

apostolic testimony and take the nerve out of the Cross of Christ. "For us" is literally the crucial phrase. It belongs to the Cross alone.

The third expansion is in all the creeds of Christendom, and there is no call to justify its inclusion in the proposed Confession. The Resurrection of Jesus was in the forefront of apostolic preaching, and it is as clear as history can make it that but for that event the Church would never have begun to be. The pathetic theories advanced from time to time in the interests of negative criticism confirm one, if confirmation be required, in the truth of the Resurrection of our Lord. Theories of fraud, swoon, vision, legend, and spirits have all been propounded in order to account for the belief that Jesus rose from the dead or for the birth of the Church. It is a strange psychological phenomenon that so many people cling to the craziest of theories rather than yield to the simple explanation of the Church's origin which is given in the New Testament.

In a previous chapter reference was made to the barriers raised by the human mind itself against its acceptance of the Resurrection of Jesus as a fact, and the same ground must not be covered a second time. But this is the place for a protest against the tendency which is too prevalent in our day to tone down the apostolic testimony to this supreme event, or even to stow it into a corner, in deference to the supposed susceptibilities of a scientific age. This policy is worse than folly; it is a betrayal;

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

and were it universal, the Church of Christ would come to an end in a generation. Born in the glow of the Resurrection, the Church must keep warming its life at the same fire. Does anyone suppose that some new fact has come to light within the last nineteen centuries which makes it more difficult now than it was then to believe that One could rise from the dead? It was as hard then as now for people to accept the fact of the Resurrection. The majority refused to accept it then. The enlightened Athenians to whom St. Paul preached once were just a little more incredulous than average people, and why? Because their minds were in bondage to their own philosophies which have now for the most part gone out of date. They mocked at the Resurrection, but we have got past their philosophies now. Had St. Paul attenuated the Gospel in deference to the proud thinkers of Athens, well, he would not have gained "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." It is often jauntily assumed that St. Paul's essay at Athens was a miserable failure; but most preachers of to-day would be much elated to find even their best ventures crowned with as much success. It says much for the great Apostle that his speech at Athens is so often deemed to have been a failure. He must have hit the mark very well at other times. And he kept the Resurrection of Jesus emblazoned on his standard.

The fourth and fifth expansions need not be

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

dwelt on at length. They are combined in one in the Old Roman Creed and in the Apostles' Creed. The fifth was omitted at Nicæa in 325, but restored at Constantinople in 381. Our Lord's Ascension and His Session at the right hand of God are fundamental apostolic notes. The Ascension means that our Lord has returned for the time to His own home. In a real sense He is our absent Lord. However rich the Church's experience of Him may be through His Spirit, and we dare not set any limit to its richness, it is at the best an intimation and foretaste and earnest of what it will be when His people see Him face to face. His Session on the right hand of the Father is a pictorial expression of the power and authority which are vested in our Risen Redeemer. The right hand is a favourite scriptural symbol of might. The right hand of the Father is the whole power of God. That all power belongs to our Lord, and that it is at our disposal for our great spiritual task among our fellows, are of the very essence of His Gospel. The interval between His Ascension and His Return is a waiting time for His people, but it is a working time as well, and we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. He is absent and He is always with us. It is the glorious antinomy of hope and achievement.

The sixth expansion, "Thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead," has a secure place in the creeds of the Church, and affirms a vital part

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

of apostolic faith. It is too little to say that Jesus claimed to be the Judge of men. He took His place as the One who would be the Judge of all men by and by. His assumptions are always more impressive than other people's claims. See how many of His parables are concerned with judgment to come. Take judgment out of the New Testament and you change the structure of the Book. That is sufficient warrant for the inclusion of this expansion. The only question one feels disposed to ask here is: Why is there so little preaching to-day of Christ as Judge? The Gospel is fundamentally a unity, and Christ as Judge is organic to that unity. It follows that the omission of this note in preaching is a failure "to declare the whole counsel of God." The recoil from Calvinism already referred to has for the time taken the iron out of the Church's blood, and its thought of God is tainted with a weak sentimentalism which is foreign to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church needs nothing so much as to return to the whole Christian thought of God. The fear of God is needed to make wicked men tremble. It is needed to bring health to us all. The policy of hiding Christ as Judge is fatal both to Church and world.

ARTICLE III

The whole of the third Article in the proposed Confession is taken from the Old Roman Creed, with the change of a single word, *flesh* being replaced

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

by *body* in the last expansion. That creed, as has already been pointed out, deliberately changed the apostolic phrase in the interests of apostolic truth, as it was quite entitled to do. Now that Gnosticism is no longer a menace to the Church's faith, it is better to return to the scriptural phrase, "the resurrection of the body."

The principal clause in the Article, "And in the Holy Spirit," is preferred to the later form of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit"; because there seems no good reason why the third Article should have a different introduction from the second. Anything is to be welcomed which encourages the impression that the whole Confession is one, that the truth believed in is all of a single piece, and that the believer's faith is one complete attitude of soul. The simple conjunction seems the most appropriate introduction to both Articles. A different question has been raised at this point, as to whether *belief* has the same connotation in both Articles. Has belief in the Holy Spirit the same aspect as belief in God or in Christ? It must be admitted that the New Testament formula is not: *Believe in the Holy Spirit*, but: *Receive the Holy Spirit*. We do not read: "Believe in the Holy Spirit, and thou shalt be saved." It is the glory of the Spirit to glorify Christ and to train the believer's eye upon Him. Unobtrusiveness is a mark of the Spirit in His work upon and in human lives. He is the Great Worker for heaven on earth.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

He is God at work among men, but *as* Worker He is very silent, all the more silent and unobtrusive because He works from within.

There is a fruitful line of thought here with profound bearings upon every department of Christian life, but it can only be suggested in passing. We may be sure that a true psychology fits in with the universe of truth, and nothing is more certain psychologically than that there is a kind of self-consciousness which is inimical to the spiritual life of man. We need hardly pause to say that we do not refer to self-consciousness in the philosophical sense, for there it belongs to the very essence of spiritual life. We take it in its popular meaning, the feeling which is so familiar to the bulk of the race and which tends to become most painful in those of highest spiritual potentiality, the feeling of being in one's own road and standing in one's own light. It belongs to the solitariness of human personality, the burden of the soul's loneliness. The greatest souls on earth have passed through the loneliest valley. "Now this valley is a very solitary place." It is not presumptuous to believe that this was part of our Lord's incomparable burden. He was less understood than any other on earth. Even "His own received Him not." "He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him." Barriers in other lives kept Him out from them, but there was no barrier in Him to keep them out from Him. We see from afar

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

the loneliness of Jesus even as the favoured three watched His anguish in Gethsemane.

In Jesus this self-consciousness which would else have paralysed Him was sublimated into redeeming energy by being filled with God. Is it too much to say that the Spirit saved Jesus from the perils of self-consciousness by keeping His gaze fixed on God? But to come down from these lofty flights, the ordinary mortal knows too well what it is to be unnerved by self-consciousness. The lower type of mortal, who is by no means unnerved, is made all the more ludicrous by it, but it is better to leave human peacocks out of the reckoning at the moment. Self-consciousness is a real enemy of humble and earnest souls, but the Holy Spirit seeks to turn the enemy into a friend by putting Jesus in place of self in the believer's soul. The soul is delivered from its prison—and its prisons are legion—by having Christ put upon its throne instead of self. The Spirit does not put *Himself* upon the throne. Why? Because it is His task to inweave Himself with the believer's spirit; and if the believer's attention were occupied with Him, it would still be only a refined form of self-consciousness. But let there be no mistake here. It does not mean that the Holy Spirit lacks objectivity. If the human spirit were wholly taken into the life of the Divine Spirit, as it was in the case of our Lord's earthly life, we may well believe that self-consciousness would then "pass in music out of sight" and become Spirit-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

consciousness, which would be identical with God-consciousness. But that is never the situation in the case of us human beings. At the best, the human spirit falls short of absorption by the Divine Spirit. It must be so as long as we live under the conditions imposed upon us by the present order of things. We have all "somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become." Even if some think they have nothing to cast off, they can hardly deny that they have something to become. Jesus Himself was made "perfect through suffering." He could not be our sufficient Saviour till He had emptied the bitter cup to the dregs.

So long as the human spirit is only partially absorbed by the Divine—and no human being on earth gets beyond that condition—the Holy Spirit calls the attention of the believer not to Himself but to Christ. Healing and health come to the soul from the outward-looking eye. Salvation cannot begin for us till we lift up our eyes to the hills. Herein lies the religious value of the distinction between the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit, between Jesus as absent, waiting to come again in power and glory, and Jesus as present in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that the New Testament, although always on the verge of identifying the Holy Spirit with the Risen Lord, never actually equates them. The solitary instance in which it seems to do so is when St. Paul says: "Now the Lord is the Spirit" (II Cor. iii. 17). But in

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

that chapter the Apostle's mind moves in the circle of Old Testament thought. He speaks from the standpoint of "veiled" Israel, and "the Lord" means Jehovah. For Israel "Jehovah is the Spirit." In any case it can be said with certainty that St. Paul habitually distinguished between the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. These indeed represent the two foci of all his thinking. Christian thought must preserve the distinction. Not so much in the metaphysical interest, although it serves that interest also, but in the interest of Christian life, the eye of faith must be directed to the transcendent Christ who once tabernacled among men. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to minister Christ to men.

In all true religion the object of trust, reverence, and worship must be transcendent. A man enters upon the religious life when he believes in salvation by Another who is adequate to the task. But such adequacy implies that the saving power beyond ourselves must have some means of coming into direct contact with our lives. It must have the faculty of working itself into us and raising us to our highest terms. That is to say, it must include the power of immanence, that power of which we have no more than an intimation in the influence which one human being may exert upon another. The Holy Spirit is God immanent. In thought, immanence is as essential to the conception of God as transcendence. In fact, God is both over all things

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

and in all things, although the manner in which He is in them varies between the opposite poles of reality. But in the whole life of religion, both devotional and practical, the eye of faith is pledged to look beyond itself. Christianity cannot do without the immanence of God, but its gaze must be towards the transcendent. The Holy Spirit trains the eye of faith upon Christ. Our only true attitude to the Spirit is one of receptiveness. If we are not receiving Him we are shutting Him out from our lives. But receiving implies believing ; and since we are dealing with a Confession of faith we are justified in keeping to the form which is probably as old as the New Testament itself : " I believe in God the Father ; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord ; and in the Holy Spirit."

"And in the holy Church." Here we are no longer in the region of objects of worship, but of things to be believed in all the same, and believed in with all the warmth of devotion that fits the object. The holy Church is the Church of the saints on earth, saints being all those—men, women, and children—who have set their hearts on Christ and their faces heavenward. And since every member of the Church has professed to have set heart and face that way, and since even the Church is not the final judge of anyone, the holy Church means the much - maligned and very imperfect organised Church. Of course, when one says : " I believe in the holy Church," he does not profess

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

any liking for a Church which is dead, nor does he deny that a Church may cease to live. He professes his belief that the Church was born of the Spirit at the first, that it lives by the Spirit still, and that thus living, it is the visible instrument in the hand of Christ for the accomplishment of His redeeming purpose among men.

The Church is the organ of the Holy Spirit. It is a deplorable circumstance that so many, especially in Protestant circles, do not understand this. The weakness of Protestantism is most apparent in its comparative failure to create and foster the idea of the Church. Its excessive individualism has worked towards that failure, and its pathetic splits have well-nigh completed the process. Unless it bethinks itself and recovers the true Church idea, its future is sorely mortgaged. The Church may be, in fact, a very poor organ of the Spirit, but, if that be so, it is the Church's fault. In any case, it is the only organ there is, and that fact should prevent anyone who professes to be a follower of Christ from being nothing to the Church except a critic of it. When it is said that the Church is the only organ of the Spirit, it is not meant that the Spirit is inactive in the world except through the Church. The meaning of the thesis may be brought out most clearly and briefly through an illustration. Before any Christian man set foot in Central Africa, the tribes there were living their own kind of life. Religion meant much to them, but not in the way of help.

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

They felt themselves surrounded by a host of spirits bent for the most part on doing them harm. Their morality was on a level with their religion. The tribes fought with each other, following the law of the survival of the fittest. It looked for a while as if "the wild Ngoni" would reduce or exterminate every other tribe within geographical range. The slave-raider made matters infinitely worse, although perhaps, unconsciously, he was preparing the way for a better time by intensifying the miseries of the poor broken folk and thus inducing in them a greater readiness to welcome a new day, should such ever come.

Was the Spirit doing nothing all the time among those poor creatures? The thought is intolerable. We may be sure that the Spirit of God was brooding over the darkness, as it was before the world's first morning, affecting all and touching some to finer issues. God's river was carrying down soil from the mountains to make the rocky ground fit to yield a harvest some day. But where was the seed to come from? "How shall they hear without a preacher?" That question hits the nail on the head. The Spirit was certainly working out there, but He was working in Scotland also, stirring the Church in that country to do its part in Africa. He was sharpening His instrument in the homeland. By and by it happened that the burden of Central Africa was laid upon the soul of David Livingstone, son of the Church, freeman and lover of Christ. The

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

rest of the romance follows according to the programme of the Gospel. The seed was sown by the Church in the heart of Africa, and now the wild Ngoni are tamed ; Central Africa knows what peace and order mean ; and Christ is coming to His own in that land. "Behold, I make all things new." But the Church had to do its part as the organ, the sole organ, of the Spirit. The Church is entrusted with the Gospel, and the worst it can do is to fail to preach it.

"The forgiveness of sins." This second expansion of the third Article brings us to the redemption which we have in Christ and which is mediated to us through the Holy Spirit and His instrument, the Church. We must have the benefits of the redemption represented in the Confession. Christianity is the religion of salvation, and salvation begins in rescue. It would clearly be unfitting in a Confession to aim at a catalogue of these benefits. What is wanted is that they should be suitably represented, and it cannot be doubted that the representative benefit selected by the Old Roman Creed and reproduced in our suggested Confession is the best that could have been chosen. The forgiveness of sins is the foundation of the redeemed life, and it is with foundations that we have to do in the Confession. It is the foundation of the New Covenant, as the prophet Jeremiah predicted it would be. "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, . . . for I will forgive their iniquity,

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. xxxi. 31-34). That amazing forecast was endorsed and fulfilled six centuries later when, on that night in which our Lord was betrayed, He took the cup and gave it to His disciples, saying: "This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Forgiveness is the first gift of Christ to His own, and it is the gate of entrance to all His other gifts. To the man who is forgiven, all things are possible.

"The resurrection of the body." This third expansion of the third Article, and last affirmation of the Confession, may be criticised from two sides. First, it may be said that it is needless. The forgiveness of sins having been affirmed as an article of faith, it may be felt that nothing more needs to be said about the benefits of the redemption. The answer to this is that while Christianity is a spiritual religion, it is not spiritual in any sense which excludes from its gracious scope any part of the life of man. Redemption is not for the soul only, as if there were some other part of human life which is bound to go to wreck. It is for the whole personality. The forgiveness of sins is certainly the basal experience in all the redemption, but it does not immediately suggest the redemption of the body, and it is required of a Christian Confession that it do that.

We have an authoritative analogy which can help us here. When our Lord instituted His Supper,

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

we may take it that, at the very least, He meant it to represent the essence of His Gospel. The two parts of the Supper, whatever more they were, were parables—the Parable of the Bread and the Parable of the Cup. Now, why this second parable? The Parable of the Bread seems to express the whole spiritual intention with incomparable simplicity and power. Bread is the staff of life; the breaking of it exhibits the Lord's death; the giving of it to us means that His death was for us; our taking and partaking of it signify that as truly as bread nourishes our bodies, so truly, through faith, we nourish our spiritual life on the Lord once crucified for us. The whole Christian religion seems gathered up there. Then, why the Parable of the Cup? If it be answered that it was a custom with our Lord to speak twin-parables on a single theme, that compels us to ask for the explanation of that custom. We cannot think that it was simply for the sake of impressiveness. The most natural explanation of the second parable is a feeling in our Lord's mind that, while the Parable of the Bread covered by implication everything that required to be covered, it did not immediately suggest something which must be immediately suggested in the Supper. That was the forgiveness of sins. So He added the Parable of the Cup, in which the pouring of the wine suggested at once the shedding of His blood and the remission of sins; while, as if the suggestion were not vivid enough in the symbol,

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

He added words about which there could be no mistake: "This is . . . shed for many for the remission of sins." A Confession also must powerfully suggest everything that is vital in the faith; and therefore, although the forgiveness of sins implies the whole redemption, the resurrection of the body must have a place to itself in order that it may be quite clear that Christ saves to the uttermost.

The second criticism is from the negative side, and is much more serious. It is to the effect that the resurrection of the body is too difficult to be believed. This type of criticism has already been answered, and it is sufficient now to say that we take our stand, with the New Testament, upon the Resurrection of our Lord. "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that sleep." There is no suggestion in the New Testament that the body which is to rise from the dead will contain the particles of matter which composed it at the moment of death. The doctrine which is implied in the resurrection of the body is that the body is more than mere particles of matter. It is the register and organ of the spirit, and when it becomes also a temple of the Holy Spirit its redemption is begun even now and will be completed at the resurrection. What happens after death to the body which is unredeemed is not revealed, and we need not ask. We know that it is an unspeakably awful thing to be "lost," for Christ paid an

A CREED FOR CHRISTENDOM

unspeakable price to save the lost. But the pledge which binds a man to Christ makes him heir to the fairest of all hopes. It is the hope which cannot put anyone to shame, for it is built on One who does not fail. It is not the way of Christ to disappoint the trust and love of His friends. He will surprise them by bringing them to something which will far surpass their brightest dreams. The body with which they are to rise will match their spirit, even as His risen body matches His, and they will be "like Him," for they will see Him as He is.

CHAPTER IV

RECONCILIATIONS

It is one of the most pathetic things in life when the wedge of discord finds its way into a family. Where there is full and healthy life there are bound to be differences of opinion, and where in addition there is a good understanding between the members these differences may quite well minister to progress and happiness in the home. What introduces the ominous wedge is either a bad feeling somewhere, or the absence of good feeling; and sometimes it is a petty misunderstanding. The wedge is frequently inserted by someone outside the family, but an opening has been left for it, like a joint in one's armour, and hearts are sundered, sometimes never to be reconciled. Time, which is sometimes called the great healer, just as often drives the wedge home. The mote of misunderstanding grows to a beam and the gnat to a camel, until reconciliation can only be effected by a miracle. But miracles happen.

The law of the wedge has operated with tragic effect in the Church. The real cause of the early partitions was not doctrinal difference but worldly

RECONCILIATIONS

ambition and political intrigue. It is not to be thought that the whole Church had thus surrendered to the world. There was just enough of the surrender, especially on the part of those who had come to form a hierarchy, to make the wedge do its deadly work. The actual divisions were not the worst consequence of the Church's worldliness; these were only symbols of the enemy within the gates. The evil tempers which did the mischief survived in the sundered parts and were sure to work mischief of a more subtle and ruinous kind. God never left Himself without true witnesses in any age of the Church; but by the time that the Protestant Reformation was due such witnesses were not in evidence in the ranks of those who were most responsible for the tone and policy of the Church of Rome. How a Church could degenerate into the institution which stood for religion in Scotland in the century preceding the Reformation is a question which should give every Church much searching of heart. The only tribute that can be paid to the pre-Reformation Church is that the Reformation was effected by men who had been nursed on its bosom. That Church, as represented by its hierarchy, had not only fallen away from purity of doctrine. It had lost that spirit of love which is the genius of the Christian religion. The two things of course were likely to take wings together.

But it can hardly be maintained that right doc-

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

trine and the right spirit came back to their nest together at the Reformation. Half of Europe was brought back to the truth of the Gospel, but not to that spirit of love which is the atmosphere of the Gospel. Men held the truth fast but rarely did they hold it in love. In Christian doctrine the Reformers were far above the champions of Rome, but in Christian charity their superiority was not so marked. What is supremely needed in the Church is that love should now come back to her own. A book on the creeds is necessarily a book about doctrine; but a study of the Church and its creeds drives home one conviction more strongly than any other, that a revival of the spirit of love is the prerequisite of all improvement in the Church and in the world. It is the absence of the spirit of love that has done all the damage, and only the recovery of that spirit can work the repair. We do not plead for peace at any price. The unity which is purchased at the cost of truth is not worth the having. We do not even plead for formal unity all round, for that is out of the question at the present hour. But we do plead, and plead with all whom our words can reach, for love. Love has become a tragic need. Let no one who names the name of Christ say it is impossible. The world's wounds, "these poor dumb mouths," cry out for healing. Why should Christ Himself be wounded in the house of His friends? If the Church continues to fail Him in its great task of love, it will be

RECONCILIATIONS

the first to suffer in the judgment which must come.

There is less bitterness between Churches now than there has been for four centuries, less also than there was in very early days between the Eastern and Western branches of the Church. That is something to be thankful for, although we should like to be assured that the abatement of false emotion does not come from the Laodicean spring. On the other hand, doctrinal differences have grown to alarming dimensions. The gap has widened, for the slow, sure hammer of time has driven in the wedge. This fact alone makes it manifest that the mere absence of bitterness will not restore a common sense to Christendom. Only the miracle of Christian love can effect a reconciliation in such a situation. The Church is now like a divided family whose members have at length grown tired of the divisions and would fain have them healed, but they have committed themselves so far to their separate positions that it would take more grace than they have to bring them together face to face so that they may look into each other's eyes and shake hands. The Church which has such grace, even if all the rest lack it, is the true pioneer, and has given the only irrefutable proof of the validity of its order.

It is as foolish to minimise the seriousness of the doctrinal differences between those Churches which are most remote from one another as it is to impeach

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

the sincerity of any Church in holding to its own position. While it is true that the heritage of the faith which is common to Christendom, when it is surveyed by itself, is seen to put all possible differences into the shade, yet the character of the actual differences is such as to affect the common heritage vitally. The differences, in short, amount to nothing less than variant views as to what Christianity really is. Divergent doctrines of the means by which men appropriate the grace which is in Christ Jesus give rise to divergent doctrines of the grace itself. Our idea of the unseen reservoir hangs upon the kind of channel which we have cut for ourselves. If the channels all convey the water of life, though in different ways, the differences ought not to count for much. But do they? Some Churches at all events pronounce the channels of others to have no contact with the reservoir. Who is to be the judge, and what is to be the test? These are hard questions. Here are Churches which interpret Christianity differently, and each clings sincerely to its own interpretation. It looks like an *impasse*.

We can at least say that there is something far wrong somewhere. It would be a real gain if we could get the whole Church to feel that and to feel it with as open a mind as possible. It is a commonplace, but some commonplaces are the very things we need to return to, and this is one of them, provided our minds are not finally made up

RECONCILIATIONS

that whatever is wrong it is not with ourselves but with others. Cromwell's passionate appeal to the Scottish Presbyterians to think it possible they might be mistaken ought to be issued to the whole Church in respect to the things which divide. The strength of the influence of our environment upon us can hardly be exaggerated. The kind of soil in which we have been planted determines largely the kind of thing into which we grow. This law of environment, which is necessary to the progress and even to the existence of the race, is yet often allowed to work unnecessary harm. Our traditions are meant to help us to see, but they may easily blindfold us. When two Churches which profess to be Christian find themselves holding mutually inconsistent conceptions of Christianity, it is the obvious duty of both, seeing they are Christian, to search their own minds and hearts in order to discover any possible error of thought or emotion which they may have either inherited or made. A universal mood of this kind would work wonders. Surely a common understanding about the essence of Christianity is possible. The assertion that every Church is entitled to its own opinion cannot be the last word upon the subject. There is such a thing as truth. There is such a thing as Christian truth, and it is the first task of the Church to-day to strive for a common mind as to what that truth is.

It is faithless for any individual Church to yield

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

to a sense of impotence in this urgent and sacred matter of reconciliation. What we call direct action may be futile. Other Churches may be in the mood to repel the very best advance that we can make to them. But there is a more direct mode of action than most men are aware of. A Church which is itself of the right spirit must be a praying Church. If it finds itself repulsed by other Churches it will keep praying for them to Him who is able to move the minds and hearts of Churches and men. If we accept Christianity in any conceivable form of it, we must believe, not only that God answers all prayer which is in the name of Jesus, but also that without such prayer things are bound to be wrong. Every Church can pray for the real heart-union of Christendom around a Confession of its one faith, and the Church which cannot or will not pray for that condemns itself as an instrument which is unequal to its task.

A single Church can pray and love. It can also think. With the Bible in its hand, with the history of the whole Church in full view, with the conviction which comes from its own experience of its Lord, it can strive for a deeper knowledge of the Gospel than is in the possession of any Church of to-day. Of course, a deeper knowledge must come with a deeper experience. When a stream is running very low, every pebble in its bed is an obstacle, and the fuss and noise are in inverse proportion to the strength of the flow. But when the

RECONCILIATIONS

rain descends and the river is in spate the little obstacles down below cease from sight and troubling, and you have a current which can do mighty works. It may not be like Tennyson's tide, "too full for sound or foam," but it will sail a ship or turn a mill-wheel or at least make the soil more fertile about its banks, "and everything shall live whither the river cometh."

There must be a rise in the general tide, but this does not mean that a Church's thinking must wait. Every Church must think all the time. According to its Confession: "I believe in the Holy Spirit," it must believe that the Spirit of Truth is waiting to lead it into all the truth. It can pave the way for reconciliations. It can build bridges for other Churches to pass over. Not by the too facile way of compromise, but by God's own method of getting deeper down, it can rediscover the foundations, old yet always new, upon which a worthy Christendom can be built. By finding reconciliation within its own soul, it can work most powerfully towards reconciliation with other Churches. It must be right to seek reunion with the Churches which are nearest, but it is equally right and necessary to aim at reaching those things which make for universal peace. It has to be remembered that partial union carries a peril with it. The worst enemy of the best is often the second-best, and there are limited loyalties which hinder the highest loyalty of all. The brotherhood of a sect may be the most

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

stubborn foe of the brotherhood of mankind. The only way to avert this calamity is by preserving the true human outlook. The minister of Christ must take the whole world for his parish; and a community which sets itself up as a Church of Christ must do all its thinking with an eye of charity on all mankind and, what is really harder, on every other Church.

It makes the blood flow better in the veins to think of some of the reconciliations which are waiting to be accomplished. There, for instance, is the reconciliation between East and West. The first split in Christendom was there; and while others which have occurred since then may go deeper down, upon the principle that quarrels between near friends are the worst, it remains true that the division between the Churches of East and West has affected all subsequent divisions. What if it be in the providential order that we Occidentals should begin the real task of reconciliation at the point where the estrangement began, by recognising and acknowledging that the Orient had much to say for itself in that controversy of long ago! Two things marked Christian thought in the East in that old time and do so still. One is the inviolable unity of God, implying that Jesus, although Divine, must have been in some sense subordinate to God. The other is a view of redemption as deliverance from the futility and frailty and mortality which beset human life like a prison. Deliverance from

RECONCILIATIONS

sin is included, but it does not get anything like the exclusive place which it tends to get in the Western thought of redemption.

As to the first of these two Eastern characteristics, we are free to admit that the interest which it secures is not only philosophical, as has been often alleged, but scriptural and religious as well. We must not discuss the question here, but it cannot be doubted that the New Testament makes the divinity of our Lord consistent with "a certain subordination" to the Father. Perhaps the word "subordination" should be dropped, but Eastern thought on this subject should not be offended by any Article in our Confession. As to the second characteristic, we feel strongly that here we are in a region in which we have not learned everything that the East has to teach us. If its conception of redemption has lacked something on the one side, ours has lacked something on the other. We are right in making the forgiveness of sins the foundation of all the benefits which come to man from the redemption which is in Christ; but the Church of the West very early in its career, and especially from the time when the East was alienated, tended to make too little of the structure which is meant to be raised upon the foundation of forgiveness. That structure is a life which is being wholly redeemed by the power of Christ. The Gospel is the good news that it is, because it tells us that these lives of ours are salvable to the uttermost, body, soul, and spirit;

THE CHURCH AND THE CREEDS

- Kant, 216.
 Kingdom of God, 217.
 Laodicea, 51.
 Legalism, 20.
 Leo, Pope, 56.
 Lindsay, Principal, 143.
 Literalism, 20.
 Livingstone, 105, 238.
 Logos, 39, 43, 52.
 Luther, 35, 73, 74, 75, 79, 80, 85.
 Lutheran Church, 76 ff.
 Macedonian, 47.
 Magnitude, 47.
 Marcian, 56.
 Matter, 119 ff.
 Melancthon, 78, 79, 185.
 Milton, 152.
 Miracle, 105.
 Monarchian, 48.
 Monophysite, 54, 59.
 Monotheism, 48.
 Mystery, 58, 64.
 Mystics, Mysticism, 127 ff.
 Nestorius, 52, 54, 143.
 Nicæa, 37 ff.
 Objectivity, 190.
 Office-bearers, 171, 172.
 Old Roman Creed, 22 ff.
 Origin, 48.
 Parable of the Talents, 155.
 Parousia, 61.
 Paterson, Prof. W. P., 68.
 Personality, 63, 106, 110, 132.
 Pilate, 223 ff.
 Platonic, 53.
 Prophecy, 199.
 Real Presence, 75.
 Reality, 106.
 Redemption, 43, 44.
 Reformed Church, 76 ff.
 Resurrection, 61.
 Reunion, 180.
 Sabellianism, 62, 221.
 Saints, 33.
 Scripture, Doctrine of, 85 ff.
 Seat of Authority, 67.
 Self-consciousness, 232 ff.
 Subordinate Standards, 164.
 Subordination, 48.
 Substance, 43, 58, 62, 218 ff.
 Suggested Confession, 209.
 Te Deum, 23.
 Tertullian, 57.
 Tetzl, 74.
 Thirty-nine Articles, 93 ff.
 Thought-forms, 137, 147.
 Toledo, 48.
 Tradition, 67, 68.
 Transcendence, 235.
 Transubstantiation, 97.
 Trent, Council of, 65 ff.
 Trinity, Trinitarian, 18, 19, 23, 61 ff., 202 ff.
 Tritheism, 62.
 Unitarianism, 53.
 Venture, 24.
 Virgin Birth, 27, 143, 197.
 Wallace, A. R., 103.
 Westminster Confession, 81 ff.
 Whitehead, Dr. A. N., 113, 220.
 Wittenberg, 73.
 Zwingli, 74, 75, 85, 185.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Jer. 31³¹⁻³⁴, 240.
 Matt. 5¹⁷, 86.
 Matt. 6¹⁰, 93.
 Matt. 16¹³⁻²¹, 14, 84.
 Matt. 26²⁸, 240.
 Matt. 28¹⁹, 20, 21.
 John 7¹⁷, 131.
 Rom. 3-4, 80.
 Rom. 9-11, 92.
 Rom. 10⁹, 10, 14.
 1 Cor. 12³, 17.
 2 Cor. 3¹⁷, 234.
 Eph. 1⁴, 5, 92.
 Eph. 1¹⁻¹⁴, 213.
 Eph. 4⁹, 31.
 Phil. 2¹¹, 17, 165.
 1 Peter 3¹⁹, 31.
 1 John 5⁶, 226.



BT
990
L3

Lamont, Daniel.

The church and the creeds, by Daniel Lamont ... London, J. Clarke & co., limited [1923]

255, 11 p. 191^{cm}. ("The living church" series)

1. Creeds. 1. Title.

CCSC/mmmb

Library of Congress



BT990.T3

A9167

